

**Political Rush Hour on the Tobin Bridge:  
Receivership and the Redevelopment of Chelsea, Massachusetts**

By

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B.S. Mechanical Engineering  
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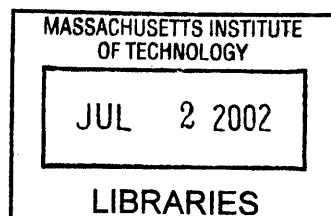
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***ABSTRACT***

In September 1991, the Massachusetts State Legislature passed an Act that placed the city of Chelsea, Massachusetts under state receivership. Though the State justified receivership as a response to the City's bankruptcy, they acknowledged that the fiscal problems could not be solved without overcoming a corrupt local political structure. A staff of state-appointed receivers took control of the City for an ensuing five-year period with the charge of regaining fiscal solvency and writing a new city charter. During this time, the receivers initiated a consensus process with the residents to engage them in rewriting their city charter. The receivers were offering a unique opportunity for a state intervention to facilitate a local bottom up process to consider new possibilities for a local government structure. This held the potential to institutionalize greater public participation in local governance and redevelopment.

However, I argue that the receivership primarily facilitated metropolitan planning agendas at the expense of public participation in local planning. Chelsea, less than two miles from both downtown Boston and the Logan International Airport, is geographically critical to metropolitan growth and transportation planning. In Chelsea, the tensions between local and metropolitan planning are critical. Given the City's value in the Boston metropolitan area, a significant portion of Chelsea's land is allocated to uses that serve metropolitan needs. The formulation of planning processes that allow the local community to reconcile their demands with the metropolitan authorities remains critical.

In this thesis I explore the receivership and redevelopment of Chelsea, Massachusetts, during the early 1990's. I consider the similarities between the "reform" of Chelsea and the reforms advocated during the Progressive Era (1890-1920). I turn to the literature regarding the Progressive movement to understand the implications of the reform initiatives on planning outcomes. Though academic analyses of the Progressive movement do not offer insight into the planning outcomes of the Progressive Era reforms, an analysis of the reform of Chelsea lends insight into rethinking the Progressive Era. Throughout the chapters, I have placed photographs of Chelsea taken in spring 2002. The titles are not listed with the photographs to allow the reader to reflect freely upon the photographs in relation to the text. The themes and the intention of the photo essay are provided after the conclusion of the thesis.

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*Dedicated to my father, Asish Ghosh*

# FOREWORD

I first ventured over the Tobin Bridge<sup>1</sup> from Boston almost three years ago, with a map in one hand, the other gripping the steering wheel while my eyes scanned the map and searched for the road signs to match. Although Chelsea is less than two miles from Boston, in the past I had only driven through Chelsea to take a back route to Logan airport when during rush hour on Route 93 a five-mile trip to the airport could take an hour or more. When I thought of Chelsea, the mountain of road salt and the oil tanks along the waterfront came to mind. I never considered who inhabited the brick row housing and struggled for work in this city, but chose it for the social networks available to them and the affordable housing that could provide a stepping-stone. In fact, this largely first-generation immigrant city occupying only 1.8 square miles, but isolated from rapid transit, received relatively little attention from most Boston residents. I was taking this particular trip to Chelsea to meet a young girl who was to become my “Little Sister,” and I have continued to visit Chelsea regularly to spend time with her.

During my frequent trips to Chelsea over the past three years I began to notice a subtle change in the City. I recognized new developments, including a five-story parking garage, a couple of small cafes and a new hotel. I read about the conversion of a school building to artist lofts, while others were being rebuilt. And I became interested in how development would impact this distressed city – a city that houses over 10,000

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<sup>1</sup> The Maurice J. Tobin Memorial Bridge connects coastal highway Route 1 to downtown Boston, between the city of Chelsea and Charlestown (a neighborhood of Boston).



undocumented immigrants and a working class population that relies on the proximity to Boston and the affordable housing. Would development lead to gentrification, as I had knew happened so often in Boston's working class neighborhoods? Would the residents living in Chelsea face displacement and need to seek new places to settle? Are there any other alternatives to reviving a distressed city, that allow the people to better their conditions and remain in their homes?

As I investigated these questions, I learned that the Massachusetts legislature had declared Chelsea bankrupt in 1991. During an ensuing five-year period of state receivership, the receivers initiated a consensus process with the residents to engage them in rewriting their city charter. As a student of urban planning, I knew this was a unique innovation. Consensus processes are rare in the first place, and more surprising in the context of shaping a new local governance structure in a low-income community. I felt immediately hopeful that by involving residents in the process there would be something different in the development of Chelsea, such as covenants for affordable housing, strict regulations on industrial uses, or provisions for improving public amenities for city residents. I hoped that by exploring the landscape of Chelsea visually I could draw a relationship between community involvement in planning and the physical environment. Could Chelsea's receivership have been a momentous event in planning and redevelopment?

Thus began my inquiry into the politics of land use in Chelsea and the recent history that led to the current development agenda in the City. My research on Chelsea,

Massachusetts, has been fascinating, and the complexity of the issues have been challenging. I take full responsibility for the interpretation of events in my narration of the receivership and redevelopment of Chelsea. On the other hand, this thesis could not have been written without the candid and thoughtful responses of Chelsea community organizers, Chelsea city officials past and present, the receivership staff appointed to Chelsea, and others invested in the plight of Chelsea. I was fortunate to have the willingness of a number of individuals to take inordinate time out of their hectic schedules to reflect with me about their experience in Chelsea; a city that brought back a rush of nostalgia for some while others continue to dedicate their days (and nights) contemplating its future; a city whose plight never elicits a neutral response.

I relied on personal interviews with many individuals to conduct my research. I would like to thank Steven McGoldrick, Director Metropolitan Area Planning Council, who took the time to talk with me at length as well, provide supporting materials and answer follow-up questions. Susan Podziba, Public Policy Mediator, Susan Podziba and Associates, for sharing the details of the consensus process and suggesting areas of research. Roberta Miller, President, Roberta Miller and Associates, for her reflections on public participation in local governance. Bob Luongo, Executive Director of Economic Development, New Bedford, Massachusetts, for recalling many events before, during, and after receivership, and for sharing his reflections as a seasoned planner. Gladys Vega, Assistant Director, Chelsea Human Services Collaborative, for taking the time to talk with me and for offering me supporting materials. Jay Ash, Chelsea City Manager, for speaking with me at length. Carol Gladstone, Principal, GLC Development, LLC, for

pointing me in the right direction and sharing her experience in Chelsea's development activities. Daphne Politis, Principal, Optimal Solutions, for sharing insights about the neighborhoods and schools. Ned Keefe, Executive Director of Planning and Development in Chelsea, Massachusetts, for details on the planning process and his reflections as a planner. Nadine Mironchuk, resident of Chelsea, for taking me through an impromptu tour of Chelsea's history. Harry Spence, Commissioner, Department of Social Services, for reflecting on his goals and achievements during his term as receiver in Chelsea. And Dr. John Silber, Chancellor, Boston University for his candid responses to my questions. I admire all mentioned for their support of academic projects (I know I am not the first or last to ask for their input into a thesis). Finally, Jean Riesman, Ph.D. Candidate, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, took the time to talk with me and provided supporting evidence willingly during the last weeks of her dissertation, a very unselfish and much appreciated contribution.

I could not have completed this thesis without my advisor, Professor Diane Davis, who unhesitatingly encouraged my ideas, while unrelentingly questioning my theoretical framework. I admire her intense engagement with her students and appreciate her generosity in both time and kind words. My work with Professor Anne Whiston Spirn inspired my interest in the visual understanding of urban landscapes. Her vision of the power that understanding landscape lends to communities will continue to motivate my work in the future.

For insightful comments and critiques in the reading of previous drafts, I would like to thank Anna Ghosh, my sister and lifelong friend. For feedback throughout the process, I thank my husband Narasimha Rao, who cheerfully tolerated one topic of conversation over the past few months and the ups and downs of my academic life over the past three years. His companionship has been invaluable.

On the personal front, I thank Paul Martin for pushing me to pursue a topic that would captivate my attention even if it meant giving up a summer's worth of research. Asha Nadkarni for constant support and for always, always understanding. Margie Wood for her cheerful encouragement. My parents for allowing me to be distant when it was required. And especially my mom, for bringing me dinner when that was required more!

Finally, I cannot thank Meg Flynn enough. I will never forget the unyielding encouragement, inspiration, and support she freely gave to me. From conceptualizing the topic to the final print, her camaraderie made this project possible. Most importantly, her friendship holds a cherished place in my life.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Reforming Chelsea**

In 1991, a distressed waterfront city less than two miles north of Boston drew a rush of political interests forward to contemplate its future. Although Chelsea, Massachusetts, had thrived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as industrial uses relocated to Chelsea from the crowded waterfront of Boston, by 1991 a mix of heavily polluting and decaying industry and oil tanks dotted the waterfront, and traffic to and from the airport congested the local roads. The city administration was unable to balance the budget, partially due to administrative corruption. The mayor complained that unions had a stranglehold on the city. And the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was pursuing organized crime entrenched in the City. Despite its shortcomings, Chelsea boasted a number of advantages. The location of Chelsea within the Boston Metropolitan Area provided proximity and access to Boston, enticing residents and developers who facing exploding land prices in Boston. In addition, across the Chelsea Creek and less than two miles away in East Boston, Boston's Logan International Airport served as a major hub to New England travelers.

Meanwhile, the prestigious Boston University (BU) had been managing the Chelsea Public Schools since 1989, in an unprecedented partnership and model for public education. In the mid-'1980s Dr. John Silber, then President of BU, had strongly

advocated that BU's School of Education take over the management of the Boston Public Schools, to no avail. In spring 1986, Andrew Quigley, the Chairperson of the Chelsea school committee, and Chelsea Mayor John Brennan offered an alternative and requested that BU propose a solution to save Chelsea's failing school system. Short staffed, underfunded and unable to engage the student body in a traditional educational system, Brennan and Quigley saw a glimmer of hope in a world-class university with a president ready for a challenge. Two years later, in April 1988, BU's Schools of Management and Education offered a 300-page plan entitled "A Model for Excellence in Urban Education" to the City. A home rule petition was forwarded to the Massachusetts legislature to approve and sign into law the Boston University – Chelsea Public School partnership. On May 3, 1989, an agreement was signed between BU and the Chelsea school committee that BU would manage the schools under a 10-year contract. The potential of the BU-Chelsea partnership as a national model was not lost on the spectators. And Peter Green, BU's Dean of Education, proposed that one goal of the project was to "emancipate the nation's underclass through education."<sup>i</sup>

Two years into the partnership, in June 1991, unable to reconcile the city income with required expenditures for schools and public services, Chelsea officials approached the State legislature and requested an advance payment on state aid. Irresolute on how to proceed with Chelsea's request for a financial bailout, Massachusetts State officials convened an ad hoc committee to determine the fate of Chelsea. In September 1991, based on recommendations of the Committee, Governor Weld suspended the local government and placed a team of state receivers in the City for a term of two to five



years. State legislation enabled the receivers to exert full authority over city administration, including renegotiations of collective bargaining contracts, rezoning initiatives and hiring and firing municipal employees with the objective of regaining fiscal solvency. Receivership in Chelsea was a powerful state intervention designed to overcome local political impediments and generate development in the City. The only provision placed on the receivers was that they write a new city charter to guide the City into the future. Within five years, the receivers not only met this challenge, but also offered an innovative approach to writing the charter, a participatory Charter Consensus Process. The receivers drew upon residents of the City to participate in and provide input into writing the charter and required their approval to pass the new city charter.

The “reform” of Chelsea, included both receivership, which placed the state-appointed receivers in the distinctive role of mediating between higher-level government interests and local interests, and the innovative consensus process. Consensus processes are rare in American planning in the first place, and more surprising in the context of shaping a new local governance structure in a low-income community. Receiver Harry Spence initiated the process with an effort to engage the community in redefining the rules of local governance. Spence hired a mediation team to design the process, build community participation, and identify community-wide issues. The team aspired to build social capital in the City among a disenfranchised citizenry.<sup>ii</sup> A consensus process within the context of metropolitan planning and state receivership held incredible prospects for innovation in the local governance of a distressed city. What new directions in urban planning and redevelopment could planners pursue with consensus building?

A decade later, Chelsea now attracts new residents to refurbished loft apartments, and continues to develop commercial property, office parks, and state of the art manufacturing facilities. The municipal administration extends tax incentives to developers and boasts a streamlined approval process. With state aid the city administration has commissioned four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school, in Chelsea, the first schools built in the city in 90 years. And the administration claims to be engaged in environmental remediation along the waterfront aspiring for significant redevelopment in the coming decades. Identified urban renewal areas promise mixed use and open space development, for livability and to attract further investment and tax revenues to the City. Seemingly, the story of revitalization in Chelsea, Massachusetts, portrays an undeniable success.

In fact, Chelsea has been recognized as the first city in which a consensus process among residents was initiated to draft a city charter. In 1998, Chelsea was one of ten cities and towns in the United States that was awarded the All-America City Award by the National Civic League. This annual award, initiated in 1949, recognizes “exemplary grassroots community problem solving.”<sup>iii</sup> Chelsea was recognized for enacting a municipal charter reform to wipe out corruption and make city government more responsive to the needs of the community. Yet, as I searched for clues of community involvement in the development efforts, I found nothing innovative and I found no institutionalization of community voice in the new charter or city administration. Amidst the accolades for

success for this innovative method, questions regarding the longer-term impacts on the community have received little attention.

At first glance, Chelsea's new city charter closely resembles many other city charters in the State of Massachusetts. A closer reading of the charter reveals that the charter establishes a relatively more powerful top-down administration than other cities. The new charter actually institutionalizes less public process and community input than before receivership. One might have expected the opposite in a charter that was written through an intensely public process. This leads to the question that has guided this thesis. Given the unique circumstances of Chelsea, in which the state-appointed receivers and the community engaged in a consensus process to rewrite the Chelsea City Charter, why did the receivers fail to institutionalize community voice in the new charter?

A closer look at the process reveals that the receivers engaged residents in a charter consensus process with limited points for consideration. Thus, the new charter was a result of a predetermined agenda of the receivers rather than a product of open dialogue. The receivers admit that they did not believe that public participation could be institutionalized in the new city administration due to past corruption and entrenched organized crime. And that the consensus process primarily provided the receivers with a means for bypassing a corrupt political structure while gaining approval within the community for the new city charter. I argue that the receivers provided a predefined solution to the local political problems - private market driven development managed by a top-down city administration, with other motives. The receivers had multiple aims,

which not only included to regain control of development from corrupt officials, but also to develop the City in a particular way. Thus, the possibilities that a local consensus process could offer were constrained, and the receivers merely used it to legitimize the administrative structure defined in the new city charter.

## **Progressives and Reform**

During receivership, the receivers established a powerful city manager position and an eleven-member council to govern Chelsea under the new city charter. In the new administrative structure, residents vote in eight councilors by district and the three citywide councilors, who then appoint the city manager. The city manager is imparted the power to, "...appoint, based upon merit and fitness alone, all officers and employees for whom no other method of selection is provided in this charter except employees of the school department."<sup>iv</sup> Included among these are the executive director of planning and development, the building inspector, the police chief, the fire chief, and the majority of the municipal employees.

The new administrative structure was been designed for "efficient" administration, especially in land use and development. The city manager appoints the executive director of planning and economic development, who then chairs the zoning board of appeals, which includes the chair and two residents. The planning director also sits on the traffic commission and licensing board. This creates a powerful position, allowing the director of planning to formulate a vision for development and effect its implementation at once. The zoning board then staffs the planning board, conservation commission, historic

commission, and economic development boards. In addition, to prevent undesired meddling by the elected council members, the charter also states, “Except as otherwise noted by this charter, no member of the city council, nor any committee of the city council, shall directly involve themselves in the conduct of the administrative business of the city.”<sup>v</sup> The structure of the new administration clearly distinguishes the political forum of the council from the non-political administration led by the city manager.

The notion that government efficiency requires disengagement from politics was introduced during the municipal reform movement of the Progressive Era (1890-1920). The reforms in Chelsea to the local government mirror reforms advocated during the Progressive movement and the results are similar: efficiency for private investment while excluding public participation in local governance. The reformers advocated that clear lines of authority would lead to ultimate responsibility of the city manager, that the city council would be remade to confine the council to policy, and that city-wide elections would take precedence to elections by district; all of which would be manifested in a rewritten city charter.

Similar to the situation in Chelsea, the Progressives promoted the city manager form of government as part of a larger package of local administrative policies in reaction to ethnic machine politics that sponsored a patronage-based system. The policies sought to insulate the administrative role of government from politics, which clearly belonged to the policy-making branch. A clear distinction between the administrative and the policy-making responsibilities of the local government could be achieved with a policy-making

council and a city manager responsible for administration. The city manager would then be accountable only to the council, rather than to the votes of the public at large. “City manager government, it was argued, produced a no-nonsense, efficient and business-like regime, where decisions could be implemented by professional administrators rather than the victors in the battle over spoils.”<sup>vi</sup>

Though these reforms were promoted as rational and neutral measures, the ideological underpinnings and the outcomes favoring the private sector must be recognized to understand the implications on the future development of our cities. The ideology behind the Progressive movement took for granted a number of presumptions, including that administration *is* a process distinct from public policy formulation, and that these roles *should* be isolated, and this *would* lead to a more efficient government. First, whether administration can be distinct from policy or non-political in nature must be evaluated. For example, by placing responsibilities for fiscal management in the hands of the administrator, one of the most powerful instruments of policy resides with one supposedly non-political figure. Second, tied to these ideas were the assumptions that such a public interest that pertains to the city as a whole actually exists, and that such a public interest supersedes the interests of any private interest groups.<sup>vii</sup> And finally, underlying the presumptions were a set of value judgments that are often overlooked: that the nature of the urban electorate precludes their ability to be trusted with control over urban governance, and that the city government’s sole function is that of service provision.

Herson points out that, “The city government text, however, sees the city only in its service role, and in doing so implies: first that providing services is the function of the city; second that the administration of these services is, and should be, the major task of the city’s government; and third, that the test for ‘good’ government is the provision of these services at the least possible cost.”<sup>viii</sup> The implications of this limited view are in fact quite powerful. If the objective of “good government” relates to service provision at least cost, the metrics of evaluating governance will reflect this bias. In reality, governments negotiate between different interest groups with disparate access to services. The concept of service provision at least cost, a business oriented approach, requires modification in the political context. While businesses may not require dialogue with their clients or customers in the delivery of their product, a government must engage in dialogue over the delivery of services. In a democracy, the role of dialogue and negotiation is essential.

Banfield and Wilson make the point that, “Nor is it necessarily true that the public interest is best served by treating the service function of government as more important or more worthy than the political one. It is entirely possible that in some circumstances it is more important to manage conflict than to make the most ‘efficient’ use of resources”<sup>ix</sup> In other words, social conflicts reflect history and politics and present social conditions that result from historical discrimination and inequality. Regardless of current claims of equality, public policy must account for the history that has shaped the unequal bargaining power in our current society. Affirmative action is one such policy measure

that transcends the service function of government, placing it in a role of mediating politics.

In fact, the Progressives intended to democratize government and enhance community leadership. Driving the movement was a backlash against the machine structure and the corruption of big business interests in political spheres. But, as McCormick points out, “More often than not, the achievement of what used to be called reform now appears to have benefited big business interests.”<sup>x</sup> Perhaps this is not surprising when one examines the reforms that were advocated as part of the Progressive package. In order to maintain the non-political nature of city administration, the Progressives advocated the establishment of regulatory and administrative boards and agencies. They failed to foresee that business interests could dominate these boards and agencies, and produced a result perverse to the original intentions. Thus, McCormick concludes, the ultimate outcome would favor business rather than political development.

Progressives believed that city administration could and should be isolated from politics. The reforms were envisioned as “neutral” responses to the political environment. Though this approach facilitates private sector development, the cost is political development. It is essential to recognize that structures that are effective in the business world may not be appropriate in a governmental context. While business may thrive with indirect mechanisms for communication with clients, governments will not.



## Thesis Overview

Echoing the Progressive movement a century later, state-appointed receivers in Chelsea, Massachusetts, attempted to overcome a corrupt local government with a top-down administrative structure. However, in the case of Chelsea, the receivers introduced what seemed like an opportunity for innovation, a consensus process to write the new city charter. This thesis is an effort to understand why the outcomes of the modern reform a century later, despite having a consensus process, did not differ from the earlier. I argue that the receivers had multiple aims in the receivership. Apart from overcoming a corrupt and criminal political structure, the State used receivership to gain control of a highly valuable piece of property that was key to metropolitan development.

In the Chapter Two I describe the justifications for receivership, the consensus process, and the metropolitan agendas at stake. In Chapter Three I examine the gains and losses of the new development agenda in Chelsea and the response of community organizers. In Chapter Four I reconsider the Progressive reforms in light of what we learn from the case of Chelsea, in terms of the relationship between local and metropolitan planning. I discuss the issues of metropolitan planning to the local communities and identify a gap in the literature between community planning and metropolitan planning. I conclude in Chapter Five by returning to critical issues that provide lessons for planners mediating between metropolitan and local planning efforts. Interspersed throughout the chapters, I have placed photographs of Chelsea taken in spring 2002. The titles are listed after the conclusion to allow the reader to reflect freely upon the photos in relationship to the text. The methodology and justification for the photographs are provided in the appendix.

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<sup>i</sup>“Boston areas bold experiment; University to manage town schools.” *USA Today*, September 6, 1989. News, p. 3A.

<sup>ii</sup> For the theoretical basis and description of goals of building social capital, see Susan L. Podziba, *Social Capital Formation, Public Building and Public Mediation: The Chelsea Charter Consensus Process* (Occasional Paper of the Kettering Foundation. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation).

<sup>iii</sup> From the National Civic League website: <<http://www.ncl.org/ncl/press27.htm>>

<sup>iv</sup> Chelsea City Charter, Section 4.2.

<sup>v</sup> Chelsea City Charter, Section 2.5.

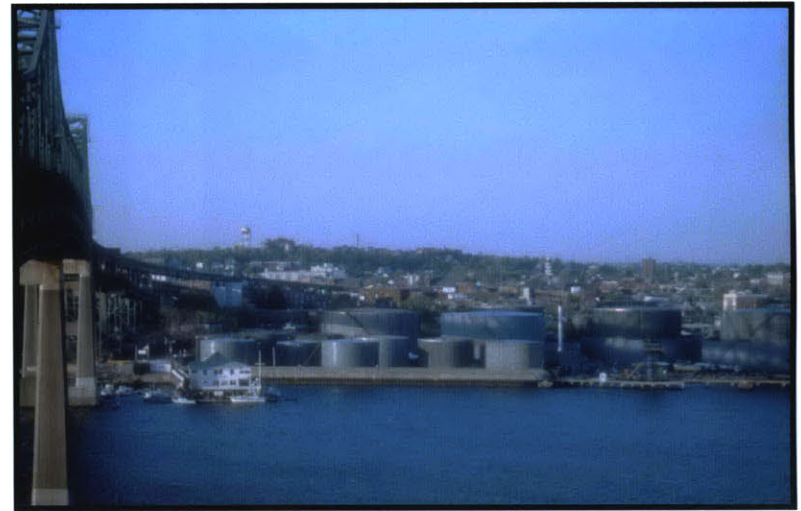
<sup>vi</sup> Robert L. Linberry, and Edmund P. Fowler, *Reformism and Public Policies in American Cities*, *The American Political Science Review*, (September, 1967) Volume 61, Issue 3, p. 702.

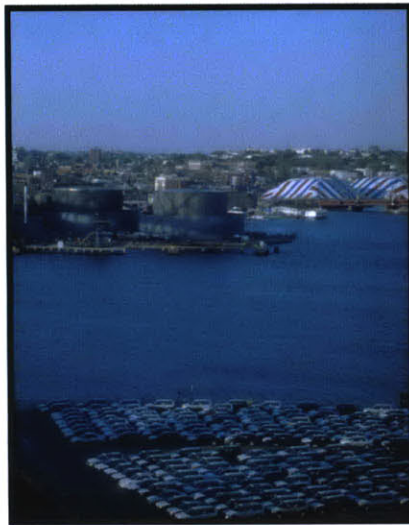
<sup>vii</sup> Linberry and Fowler, 701-716.

<sup>viii</sup> Lawrence J. R. Herson, (June, 1957), *The Lost World of Municipal Government*, *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 51, Issue 2, p. 335.

<sup>ix</sup> Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, (1963) *City Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and MIT Press), p. 19.

<sup>x</sup> Richard L. McCormick, (April, 1981), *The Discovery That Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism*, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 86, Issue 2, p. 248.



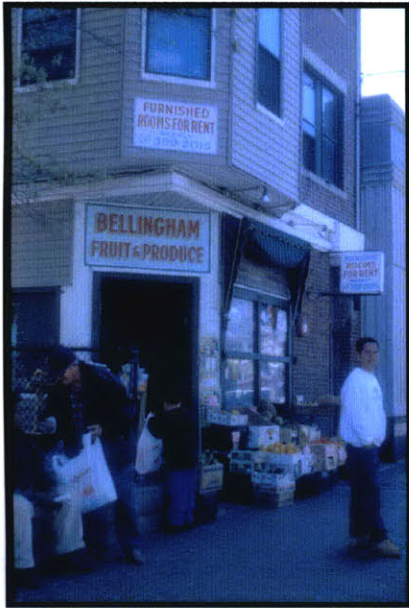


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# CHAPTER 2

## CRAFTING LEGITIMACY

### Recommending Receivership

In the early 1990's Massachusetts's constituents screamed for reform. In March 1990 the State had received the lowest bond rating in the nation by Standard and Poor. And, with a \$1 billion deficit, the Beacon Hill legislature was being described as home to a culture of fiscally irresponsible Democratic power. A discouraged Massachusetts electorate brought Governor Weld to office. Weld, the first Republican governor elected in Massachusetts in 20 years, declared a pro-environment, pro-choice stance while staying within the Republican platforms for limited taxation and reduced local aid. Cuts on local aid inevitably pinched fiscally distressed cities, including, but not limited to, Chelsea.

In response to cuts in local aid, in spring 1991 Chelsea's Mayor John J. Brennan beseeched city residents to vote for a Proposition 2 ½ override of \$2 million,<sup>i</sup> which failed on April 9, 1991, when 72% of the Chelsea voters rejected the override request.<sup>ii</sup> Soon thereafter, Brennan began advocating for either annexation to Boston or state receivership to rescue Chelsea from its financial troubles. Finally, when in a contentious political battle at a city meeting the Chelsea Board of Alderman voted for a \$4.3 million reduction in spending on education, Brennan threw in his lot. The spending reduction would jeopardize the Boston University (BU) partnership with the Chelsea Public Schools with projected layoffs of over 100 teachers. In June, 1991, the *Boston Globe*

reported, “Brennan had suggested to administration officials [State officials] that the only long-term solution to Chelsea’s fiscal problems in to put the city into receivership.”<sup>iii</sup> He requested a grant of \$960,000. Governor Weld agreed to provide advance aid to Chelsea, with the requirement that the officials agree to a state-appointed fiscal oversight team to manage the finances for the city administration.

In addition, Weld convened an ad-hoc committee of ten Chelsea residents and State officials to deliberate the future of the city. By August 1991, the committee recommended receivership and justified the recommendation based on the “over 9 million dollar deficit” that Chelsea faced on a \$40 million budget. “The only dissenting vote on the committee...came from the Senate Chairman Martin J. Dunn (D-Holyoke), who questioned whether it was necessary to usurp the city’s elective government to achieve fiscal solvency.”<sup>iv</sup> How did Chelsea end up with a deficit of over \$9 million given that the fiscal year of 1990-1991 ended with a deficit of \$2.5 million? In actuality the figure of \$9.5 million reflected the difference between the revenue and expenditure projected for the FY’91-92 budget. While expenditure was expected to rise from \$37.6 million to \$46.3 million, revenue would be expected to decrease from \$39.4 million to \$36.8 million due to reduction in local aid. The nature of “bankruptcy” in Chelsea reflected not only fiscal mismanagement, but also the dependence of the distressed city on state aid.

Thus, on September 6, 1991, Governor Weld filed legislation to abolish democratic procedure in Chelsea and appoint a state receiver for the following two to five years to



manage city administration and finances. Inordinate power would be placed on the state-appointed receiver, who would have authority to “...undo city contracts; rewrite zoning regulations; restructure fees; change the pay of elected officials; hire new staff; reorganize or abolish departments, boards or offices.”<sup>v</sup> In addition, Weld requested that the legislation be acted on within 48 hours. The *Boston Globe* reported, “Many senators agreed with Birmingham’s [the Senate President] position that, while the receivership proposal is troubling and antidemocratic, there is little alternative.”<sup>vi</sup>

In the analysis of Chelsea’s finances, it is important to note that Chelsea had no long-term debt before receivership. The city had never floated bonds, to the expense of the city’s infrastructure, but that meant the city could float bonds and finance projects without raising taxes at all. Seemingly the fiscal problems could have been addressed with some financial savvy and oversight. Further, regardless of the magnitude of the fiscal problems, was a budget deficit sufficient to suspend democratic process? Nearby cities, Lawrence and Brockton, who also suffered disproportionately due to the recession and cuts in local aid, continued to operate under the watch of State fiscal control boards. In fact, Brockton faced a \$24 million deficit going into the 1991-1992 fiscal year.<sup>vii</sup> And, as lawyer Michael Powers pointed out, “Boston ran deficits for six years, but I didn’t see anyone railroading legislation to dissolve Boston.”<sup>viii</sup> Though the State Legislation claimed bankruptcy as the motivating reason for receivership, Governor Weld alluded to other, perhaps more central, factors leading to the decision, stating that, “As much as there’s an economic problem in Chelsea, there’s a political problem, too.”<sup>ix</sup> Thus receivership of Chelsea was not simply a reaction to bankruptcy, but also in

acknowledgement of the belief that the local political structure would hinder financial solvency. After filing the legislation, “a Weld aide distributed a fact sheet entitled ‘History of Extraordinary State Assistance to Chelsea,’ intended to show that more emergency money would have a limited impact.”<sup>x</sup>

According to previous city officials, fiscal problems were deeply linked to organized crime in the community. There were city politicians and administrators who were deeply involved. As a result, Chelsea’s local government had ceased to function as an administrative entity, and was beholden to the crime entrenched in the city. Here, Weld’s history in criminal law came in useful. Weld served as U.S. Attorney in Massachusetts in the ‘80s, during which time, “He busted up one of the world’s largest marijuana smuggling rings, as well as one of Boston’s major cocaine rings. He came before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to testify on behalf of a strict federal money laundering law that eventually passed in 1986.”<sup>xi</sup> In Washington D.C., Weld headed the criminal division under President Reagan. Coincidentally, in 1988, as Weld left the capital city to return to Massachusetts, the *Boston Globe* divulged the Massachusetts Law Enforcement secret, that Whitey Bulger, notorious for his role in organized crime and his elusiveness from law, was an informant to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Weld, who had received memorandum suggesting this possibility,<sup>xii</sup> was keenly aware of the impact of this finding and the possibility to complete an unfinished agenda. One of the officials in Chelsea during receivership recalled that while Chelsea was not the center of organized crime, it was the center of illegal gambling in Massachusetts and perhaps on the East Coast. Plus, Chelsea was a huge cocaine distribution center, due to its proximity

to the airport and known for a major money-laundering ring. Weld, familiar with working with the FBI, enlisted their services in attacking organized crime in Chelsea shortly before receivership. The second receiver, Harry Spence, notes that one approach to organized crime is to disrupt the existing allocation of powers. When you do, people get upset and fights emerge, then law has an opportunity to benefit by putting pressure on some, who would otherwise be silent, to talk. Thus, receivership offered the opportunity to pursue this agenda more aggressively.

Not unrelated, State officials indicated that the city administration had lost control over the collective bargaining contracts with the unions. In September 1990, a year before receivership, the Massachusetts Labor Relations Commission issued a complaint against Brennan for cutting three firefighters from the Chelsea fire department. The Chelsea Firefighters Association claimed that Brennan violated State collective bargaining law.<sup>xiii</sup> In July 1991, the firefighters union won a court order preventing Brennan from laying off 14 firefighters.<sup>xiv</sup> Thus, in the legislation for receivership, the House beat back Senate amendments to “...curtail the receiver’s power to cut city work force.”<sup>xv</sup> In fact, the receiver’s power to renegotiate with city employees, especially those in collective bargaining associations, was a critical component of receivership itself. As reported by the *Boston Globe*, “Weld said one of the most important provisions of the proposal was the ability of the receiver to restructure existing contracts with city unions – a measure that was applauded by Brennan, but denounced by union members across the city.”<sup>xvi</sup>

As Spence concluded in his final report to the Massachusetts legislature, “The pattern of corruption revealed a community which had long been robbed of its democratic rights...While a charade of democracy had continued at the local level, the inordinate power of organized crime, coupled with ineffective local officials, had succeeded in so undermining the effectiveness of local institutions that they no longer genuinely reflected the will of the majority.”<sup>xvii</sup> There was no option but for the State to assign a receiver to the city who would be responsible for returning democracy to the people.

Not only are the outcomes unclear, but until now, perspectives on the most compelling reason for enacting receivership also vary. According to Steve McGoldrick, a receivership staff member, the ultimate call for receivership came from Boston University. “Silber recognized that their experiment would not be successful if City Hall was in a mess. All of the city administration units must be healthy – there is no such thing as a sick city hall and perfectly functioning school system or vice versa.”<sup>xviii</sup> The partnership began to extend beyond the schools.<sup>xix</sup> With the cut in Chelsea’s budget for education, the partnership stood at a precipice. Receivership enabled the partnership to continue by ensuring the funds and commitment to the project. Silber claims he was not instrumental in encouraging receivership, but he was delighted it happened. In fact, he would be happy if the city were still in receivership.<sup>xx</sup>

Meanwhile, Nadine Mironchuk, a resident of Chelsea, asserts that it was Proposition 2 ½ that ultimately led to the crisis.<sup>xxi</sup> According to Mironchuk, corruption and crime were

not as threatening as the media reported, but how could Chelsea's city administration resolve its fiscal issues with a limit on its capacity to raise revenue?

Gladys Vega, a community organizer in Chelsea, concedes that her conjecture is less typical. According to Vega, receivership resulted from the fears of the 'old boy network' that the Latino's would take over city hall. In 1989 the Chelsea Commission on Hispanic Affairs, the first political organization for Latinos outside of city hall, had managed to get a Latino elected to the school committee. Marta Rosa and Juan Vega had both run for election and Rosa won a spot. Soon thereafter, Juan Vega was elected to the city council. Gladys Vega speculates that there was a fear in the city that a Latino might run and actually win and become mayor.<sup>xxii</sup> In fact, Brennan, unfriendly towards low-income housing, was also charged by civil rights leaders for placing an embargo on Section 8 certificates in the city. The *Boston Globe* reported that Brennan claimed, "...that he instigated the embargo because he was 'tired of strangers coming to town' and felt subsidized tenants were responsible for increased crime and trash."'<sup>xxiii</sup> According to Gladys Vega, Brennan called on the State because he feared the growing political power of the Hispanic community.

## **Overriding Democracy**

In this context, Chelsea was declared bankrupt and placed under state receivership. On September 12, 1991, less than a week after he filed the legislation, Governor Weld appointed James Carlin to the job of receiver with a salary of \$1 per year. A multi-millionaire who built the largest solely owned insurance company in Massachusetts and

former State Transportation Secretary, Carlin may have taken the job for the opportunity to do something for the State, for his ego, or for political recognition, some have speculated. Whatever the reason that compelled Carlin to take the job, that the State wanted Carlin is no surprise. As secretary of transportation, Carlin gave testimony to his reputation as a no-nonsense businessman, by working with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) manager James O’Leary to relieve the MBTA of fiscal distress. “Back in the early ‘80’s, with the MBTA so low on funds it shut down for a day, Carlin and O’Leary slashed overtime spending from \$11 million to \$2 million after two months on the job and laid off more than 600 workers.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

In addition to hiring James O’Leary as an aide, Carlin asked Harry Spence to take the position of deputy receiver, with full intentions from the outset of turning the city over to Spence after eight months of “cleaning up” city hall. Spence was recruited from his position as lecturer at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, having previously served as receiver for the Boston Housing Authority in the early 1980s.

During Carlin’s tenure as receiver, his approach was to balance the books and get out. To accomplish this, he spearheaded renegotiation of the collective bargaining contracts, cut a deal with the Massachusetts Port Authority for compensation for damages for the Tobin Bridge and initiated rezoning and development of the waterfront.

Steven McGoldrick, currently Deputy Director at the Massachusetts Area Planning Council, was hired expressly to renegotiate the union contracts and after one year was

promoted to the position of chief of staff for the receiver. “The unions were very strong, especially the fire union, when we got to Chelsea,” McGoldrick claims. According to McGoldrick, the unions enjoyed considerable influence over policy making and in the Mayor’s office. They were more sophisticated in negotiation than the city. In Massachusetts when municipal employees were allowed to collectively bargain, they got their act together faster than the municipal government. Yet, he concedes, they didn’t get anything they didn’t have in their contracts, but they got a lot of perks through their negotiations.

One issue that came to the forefront of negotiations was minimum manning. The union had negotiated with the city on the number of firefighters per shift. If any number call in sick, then they will call in that many others who will charge overtime. According to the receivers, the union took away from management the right to make administrative decisions that affected the municipal budgets. The receivers brought the union to court on this and the judge ruled in the receiver’s favor. This set a precedent in Massachusetts such that unions now negotiate minimum manning subject to a yearly appropriation, based on the legislative right to appropriate funds. Other perks that were renegotiated included night differentials, hazardous duties pay, and other stipends; because, according to McGoldrick, the administrative payroll had become a nightmare.<sup>xxv</sup>

Of Carlin and Spence’s primary “achievements”, the *Boston Globe* reported that, “Carlin and Spence cut personnel, consolidated patronage-laden departments, negotiated new contracts with police and firefighters and launched an economic development plan that

has generated more than \$250 million in public and private construction projects.”<sup>xxvi</sup> In the investigation of corruption among city officials, three mayors and a high-level police official were indicted. Spence proclaimed, “It is a painful but important cleansing for the city of Chelsea.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Could this have been done without receivership? Unlikely. According to Ned Keefe, the Executive Director of Planning and Economic Development, who was a planner in Chelsea during receivership, “The city ran itself before receivership. Every department was its own fiefdom, no one answered to the Mayor.” Cutting personnel and consolidating the “fiefdoms” of city hall was no small feat.

At the end of Carlin’s term, he was ready to call receivership to a close. Carlin had hired a professional charter drafter to write the new city charter, the final task in the process. Spence disagreed. Spence, an astute administrator, realized that a charter written by the receiver with no political support in the city, would be short lived after the receivers left. On the other hand, Spence felt he could not pursue the typical process wherein a charter commission, elected among the residents of the city, writes or approves a city charter. Roberta Miller, one of the mediators in the consensus process, suggests that, in the case of Chelsea, since you would have to be a registered voter to be elected to a charter commission, such a process would exclude a lot of the people who would make up the future of Chelsea. More importantly, there would be a disproportionate number of people representing the old-establishment, the political structure that Spence needed to subvert.<sup>xxviii</sup> Once Spence decided that he didn’t want an elected team process, the question was how to gain political support from the community.



## Creating Consensus

During receivership, the media differentiated between Carlin and Spence, as, "...the former a hard-charging multimillionaire businessman with a constant eye on the bottom line, the latter a soft-spoken, even professorial, intellectual with grandiose visions of a better way."<sup>xxix</sup> With Carlin's departure, he took a lot of the community outrage with him. Spence could then engage the community in rewriting their city charter. Susan Podziba, hired to lead the charter consensus process, recalls that in 1991 she was refinancing her home, and it so happened that her bank representative was working on a community reinvestment act for Chelsea. One afternoon, over coffee, she described to Podziba the predicament of Chelsea and encouraged Podziba, who had been involved in conflict mediation, that "Chelsea needed her." Meanwhile, Spence had approached the Harvard Program on Negotiation about the possibility of conducting a research project describing possible negotiation methods to write their charter. Podziba based on a discussion with the Harvard Program on Negotiation, decided that Chelsea did not need a research project on processes, but rather an actual process, Podziba directly approached Spence and introduced her vision. Subsequently, Spence put out a request for proposals to lead a process in writing the new city charter.<sup>xxx</sup>

Podziba then contacted Roberta Miller, a former Watertown, Massachusetts, city councilor, freelancing in building community participation and teaching structured decision making for local governments. Podziba needed Miller to build community participation and identify underlying issues, while Podziba would lead the consensus

process around the major issues. In January 1993, Podziba and Miller submitted their proposal to Spence and within 10 months they had won the contract and embarked upon a consensus process to engage Chelsea residents in the writing of a their new charter. Thus, Chelsea residents were asked to participate in a consensus process to write a new city charter that would define the obligations of the reinstated local government post-receivership.

Following a series of interviews with community leaders, a public forum and training of local facilitators to run community meetings; an effort to engage the community was initiated. A series of locally facilitated community meetings, newsletters, surveys, and a charter hotline and cable television program gave the residents numerous points of access to the charter process. Residents recommended seventy candidates to serve on the Charter Preparation Team. Podziba and Miller chose three residents to serve as a selection committee, who then, together, selected twenty members to serve on the actual team. Armed with the twenty member Charter Preparation Team, including three alderman, a school committee member, a representative to the receiver, the State's assistant secretary of administration and finance, and twelve residents; Podziba and Miller embarked upon the consensus process for a period of ten months. Once the charter team approved the "new" charter, it was put to a citywide vote. On June 21, 1994, the charter was approved 60% to 40%, with a voting turnout of just over 30%.

While the fact that the receivers valued the process so that they could gain acceptance for the new city charter, what was the value of the consensus process to the residents of

Chelsea? Podziba asserts that she set out with the objective that “the social capital and possibility for public creation should continue to be available when future common problems arise.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Similarly, Miller was hoping to set up a stronger bottom up policymaking structure with a commitment to community voice. “It would be ideal in the long-term if that is the way the government would do things – they should go to the community with well framed questions and have people weigh in and make decisions and then make policy based on this. [However,] people on the receiver’s staff didn’t believe in it or believe that this is the way to govern.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Miller recalls that they spent a lot of time trying to convince the receivership staff that this could work.

Despite the remarkable opportunity of the consensus process, the receivers institutionalized nothing unique in the city charter for a city whose residents were granted the singular opportunity to participate in drafting the guidelines of local governance. Rather than institutionalizing greater public participation, in fact, “The charter provides for an unusually strong executive.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Why would a city that was supposedly skeptical of governance, submit to a heavily top-down approach? Podziba, McGoldrick and Ash, all agree that the charter consensus process was more about the process and less about the final document. McGoldrick claimed, “The objective of the consensus process was to have a dialogue, this was more important than the document that came out of it. It restored a sense of having a constitution, and put people around the table”<sup>xxxix</sup> Miller believes that, “the process gave Chelsea legitimacy in a profound way. The process created faith in government again, the charter had integrity because people created it.”<sup>xxxv</sup> While the process may have yielded a feeling of power to disengaged members of the

community, this does not reconcile the limited scope for community voice sanctioned by the consensus process.

McGoldrick recalls that he was participating as one of the two non-residents on the Charter Preparation Team (along with the assistant secretary of administration and finance) to educate the committee on what a city charter looks like. His job was to say, “This is what a city charter is supposed to say.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> There were no significant decision points on the legal aspects of the charter, since there is little possibility to vastly deviate from a typical city charter. Thus, the majority of the time was invested in a selection of critical issues: whether to retain the Mayor and aldermanic form of governance or transition to a City Manager and city council, the number of councilors and school committee members, and the composition of each in terms of by-district or at-large.

Miller notes that they provided education to the team on all of the decisions they discussed. The National Civic League, a group openly supportive of the city manager form of governance, provided literature. Meanwhile, a mayor from Seattle, strongly supportive of the mayoral form, talked with the group. Those involved in receivership repeatedly attribute the choice of a city manager over a mayor to the fact that the residents had become skeptical of mayoral government in Chelsea. Aside from the fact that the receiver was pushing the city manager form, some attribute the wariness towards government to cultural differences in the understanding of government and others to the well-known corruption scandals in Chelsea. “Chelsea did not have a good history with mayors,” McGoldrick asserts as the reason why the city manager form was accepted, “but

I don't know what would have happened if there was a groundswell to retain the mayor, that would have been interesting."<sup>xxxvii</sup> Spence argues that a competent and honest receivership led to a bias in the community towards a fairly authoritarian system and this was a compromise between democratic process and the benefits of receivership.

Ash and McGoldrick admit that to some extent the process gave the receiver "cover" for the new charter.<sup>xxxviii</sup> By involving residents publicly, there would be some guarantee that people would not dispense with it later. And there were some preconceived ideas that led to the charter's final form. Spence knew he wanted a city manager, and he also knew that a group of people in the city wanted the mayoral form. The receivers believed that the people who wanted the mayoral form, wanted to be the mayor and they had a lock on the election process. Spence needed to get around this.

In the cases where community members raised alternative issues for dialogue during the consensus process, the receivers stepped back, rather than using their power to innovate. Two instances when a "profound" difference *could* have been realized, both failed. One was a fight led by the Commission of Hispanic Affairs to allow non-citizens to vote for school committee members. In this case, Gladys Vega, an activist with the Commission at that time, contends that they had been discussing the issue with Miller and just before they were ready to vote on it, someone leaked the information to the press and opposition raged. While some papers blatantly admonished the idea, a more subtle rendering of the attitude is revealed in official reports.<sup>xxxix</sup> Echoing these, the Washington Post reported that, "...rumors were spread that even illegal immigrants would be allowed to vote.

Spence described the rumors as an attempt to play on the prejudices of non-Hispanics and further divide the community.”<sup>xl</sup>

A second issue considered was whether to elect school committee members by district or at-large. District based elections would be more likely to get minority representation on the committee, while others argued that schools are an issue that are relevant to the whole city, and not just to the neighborhood. Jean Riesman, a Ph.D. candidate in Urban Studies and Planning, who studied the consensus process in Chelsea, stresses that, “School committees are like a feeder system into local politics. They enable people to get in with a decent chance and without a huge investment to try for it.”<sup>xli</sup> She claims that this was one issue that Spence could have manipulated in the community’s favor, but he threw up his hands and said, the community must decide. McGoldrick voices a less optimistic view. Citing the example of nearby city that gained considerable support for district based school committee elections, the issue eventually lost in the citywide vote. These are both issues that McGoldrick feels the city may debate again in the future, while the receiver chose not to get tied up in them.

Members of the Chelsea Council on Hispanic Affairs, a community organization, attended the consensus process meetings and pushed for by-district voting for school committee and non-citizen voting rights on school committee. After each of these efforts fell through and the Council realized that there was little left for them to gain from the charter, they stepped back from the process. While the council announced their position against the final charter, they decided not to lead a “Vote no” campaign. According to

Riesman, the Council realized they had little to gain from the charter, and that they would have to organize around their interests regardless of the new form of governance. In addition, the old political establishment in the City was organizing a “Vote No” campaign and if the charter did not pass the vote, this would only fuel support of their positions. If the charter were to return to the drawing board under such conditions, the Council was concerned that the outcome could be even worse.<sup>xlii</sup>

Ultimately the consensus process served the receivers’ objectives of instituting a more top-down administrative structure, and provided legitimacy to the new charter. What compelled the receivers to craft this legitimacy? Were they simply well intentioned public servants doing what they thought best for a distressed city? I argue that there were other motives larger than Chelsea that the receivers and the State legislature had in mind.

## **Metropolitan Motivations**

Receivership, while designed to overcome local political obstacles and restore fiscal solvency to Chelsea, required sufficient political wherewithal at the state level for approval in the legislature. As the Massachusetts legislature enacted receivership, Peter Nessen, the State’s Administration and Finance Secretary, stated, “...the cost of providing Chelsea with a receiver and staff could approach \$500,000 a year.”<sup>xliii</sup> Since the State bears the costs of receivership it therefore must deem receivership necessary and worthwhile. Accordingly, does political corruption sufficiently explain the motivations of the State? This seems unlikely, since certainly other cities in the Boston metropolitan area are known for corrupt administrations. Further, organized crime was

not concentrated in Chelsea. This raises the possibility that other issues were at stake to prompt the State to take action. What were these? I argue that the real estate value of Chelsea in the Boston metropolitan region ultimately fueled the decision for receivership.

The relatively small size of Chelsea bears no correlation to the strategic importance of the city to the Boston metropolitan area. It's proximity to Boston, waterfront access, transportation infrastructure, and industries all contribute to reasons why so many stakeholders value Chelsea. Immigrants value the cheaper rents, social services and social networks, and Chelsea provides neighboring Boston with a low-wage labor force. In the past Chelsea was an active working port and a prime location for fuel storage facilities, which has left its mark on the waterfront dotted with oil tanks. In terms of transportation, Chelsea provides access to Boston and to a working port. The Tobin Bridge, largely dominating Chelsea's skyline, bears regional traffic connecting State Highway Route 1 and the North Shore to Boston. The bridge has been critical to Chelsea's role as a center of trade. Proximity to downtown Boston, with commuter rail and bus access to the State's capital city, provides a desirable residential location for commuters to Boston. In the future, the Urban Ring, a planned fourteen-mile loop around Boston, will connect Chelsea directly to surrounding communities and Logan Airport with a combination of buses, light rail and rapid transit. As a result, private developers escaping the increasing cost of land in Boston and residents moving out of Boston have turned their gaze to Chelsea. Thus, a city overlooked by the economic boom and overburdened with the byproducts of regional transportation has emerged on the map like a hidden treasure.



I argue that the most compelling reason to enact receivership was to bring airport-related development to Chelsea. The Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport), owner and operator of the Tobin Bridge, has strong vested interests in Chelsea. Massport owns and operates Boston's Logan Airport, less than two miles from Chelsea in neighboring East Boston. Since the '80s Massport officials had been seeking land to relocate airport-related uses as plans moved forward on a "\$2 billion modernization program to bring twice as many passengers through the airport by 2010."<sup>xliv</sup> The construction of a 1.7 million square foot convention hall in South Boston to be completed in 2003, along with hotels and supporting facilities, will certainly attract the travelers to support the airport expansion. Additionally, Boston's Big Dig, designed to better connect the airport to regional roadways, will also contribute to future airport expansion. Most importantly, the terminus of the third harbor tunnel that will eventually connect the Massachusetts Turnpike to the airport in East Boston requires significant land. Therefore, Massport officials were seeking new locations for airport related uses that would be displaced as a result of this project. Riesman elucidates the value of Chelsea in this context. "Only two mile from New England's major international airport, connected by bridge both to downtown Boston and the regional highway network, Chelsea stood at the dead center of a complex and vital transportation system, whose smooth operation was indispensable to the business community and whose control was irresistible to the political community."<sup>xlv</sup> Logan Airport expansion needed land in Chelsea, a point not missed by Carlin, previous State Transportation Secretary and, I would argue, *not* coincidentally, the first receiver in Chelsea. Carlin was known to be in favor of airport expansion and in the '80's Carlin

had worked closely with Governor Edward King, former director of Massport for 11 years, towards airport expansion in East Boston.

It seemed that a strategy to distract public attention from this underlying motive was tactfully employed by the State legislature, Massport officials, and Carlin. In the legislation for receivership the Senate beat back a House amendment that would raise the toll on the Tobin Bridge from \$0.5 to \$1, and devote the additional annual \$4 million to Chelsea.<sup>xlvi</sup> Though no obvious explanation was given, it became apparent that if this toll increase were passed as a covenant of receivership it would take away Carlin's ability to feign a "get Massport" campaign during receivership. It seemed that Carlin's strategy was to 'demand' compensation from the Massport to gain public favor with the community, given their opposition to airport-related development in Chelsea. Thus, in Carlin's first few months as receiver he negotiated a deal with Massport for a one-time grant of \$5 million as accelerated compensation for the annual \$300,000 payments that Massport was already paying to the Chelsea administration in lieu of taxes for the Tobin Bridge. Initially, Carlin linked the payment to the allocation of land toward airport-related uses in Chelsea. "In a lunchtime speech to the Executives Club of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce...Carlin said he was offering to put all the industrial-zoned land on the east side of Chelsea and on the city's waterfront into the hands of Massport, and said the agency could become to Chelsea what the Boston Redevelopment Authority is to Chelsea's larger, wealthier neighbor."<sup>xlvii</sup> However, "one day after announcing the offer, Massport officials carefully explained that their commitment was for a one-time payment and not a deal to trade annual funding [through the \$5 million

payment] for waterfront and airport-related land as suggested by Chelsea's receiver, James F. Carlin”<sup>xlvi</sup>

Instead, the deal was publicized as a means to get Massport to compensate for transportation costs borne by the city of Chelsea. Yet, within days, Carlin and Massport's Executive Director, Alden S. Raine began discussions on the possibility that Massport relocate airport related uses to Chelsea. The tactic to decouple the \$5 million payment from the allocation of land in Chelsea toward airport related uses alleviated the public outrage that would have been likely had Carlin 'sold' the land to Massport. Massport executives must have been keenly aware of the community activism against airport expansion in East Boston and the potential outrage that such a deal could precipitate.

Prior to receivership only one barrier prevented Massport's access to land in Chelsea. There was a moratorium on airport related uses in Chelsea. City officials claimed they had enough freight and trucking passing through the city. But at the same time, nearly the entire waterfront in Chelsea had been declared a Designated Port Area (DPA) under State environmental protection laws designed to preserve working ports and prevent gentrification, allowing only marine related industrial uses. Prior to receivership, the city had been seeking State permission to relax the DPA, with the claim that only decaying industry remained, and new port related uses were not demanding land in Chelsea. The State did not yield and the city was prevented from attracting residential and commercial developers sorely needed to feed the city's tax base.

Receivership solved this dilemma, and with Carlin's signature, the airport related overlay district was established over the DPA, again, with no discussion with the community or opportunity for negotiation. Instead, an interim planning overlay district (IPOD) was quickly placed over the land, suddenly permitting parking and other uses previously prohibited by city council. IPOD's are used as a two-phase approach to zoning where temporary controls are used strategically by the zoning board before a decision is made on the final zoning by the city legislature. The airport overlay district in Chelsea was introduced as a tool to transition the contaminated land along the waterfront while necessary environmental remediation measures would take place. Parking was deemed a suitable temporary use since it involved capping the land but not building permanent structures in the case that a marine related use demanded the land. In which case the DPA status would require that the port use take priority. Meanwhile, the receivers, powerful as they were, did not convince to plead the State to remove the DPA status. Ash acknowledges that the city would never have zoned in airport related development, "they were afraid someone would build a runway on Broadway."<sup>xlix</sup> And till now there is no time line on when the waterfront will be opened for transition to other uses.

According to Bob Luongo, the Executive Director of Community Development at the time, there was an effort during receivership to attract the more labor-intensive airport related uses, including food preparation, commissaries, and reservation offices. Unsuccessful in this approach, the city settled for a parking garage exclusively for airport employees, a surface parking lot for airline passengers, and parking lots for rental cars.

Luongo alleges that there were some controls over the airport related overlay district (AROD), but the city did the strangest things. For one, they gave a tax incentive to developers of parking under the Tax Increment Financing (TIF), a State sponsored incentive that allows municipalities to reduce property taxes in return for job creation.<sup>1</sup> This tool is generally used by cities for development, but Chelsea used it on unlikely candidates. They gave a TIF for a Park and Ride facility, coincidentally owned by Jim O'Leary (the previous MBTA manager who had worked with Carlin).

Fiscal distress and corruption in Chelsea certainly prevented development, and receivership intervened to correct this. More importantly, metropolitan growth stood a lot to gain from the Act. Though many towns face corruption and fiscal crisis, they are not taken under state control. The most compelling reason for receivership in Chelsea was the demand for land in the city for airport related expansion and for metropolitan growth. Luongo reflects that the systems were broken in Chelsea. But after working in four different municipalities, Luongo is not sure whether they are all not broken to some extent. And other cities could certainly benefit from receivership as well. Why Chelsea?

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- <sup>i</sup>Proposition 2 ½ passed Massachusetts legislature in 1980 and prevents cities and towns from increasing property taxes more than 2 ½ percent annually without an override voted by city residents.
- <sup>ii</sup>“Defeat of 2 ½ overrides seen; as reaction to hard times,” *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1991, Metro Region, p. 19.
- <sup>iii</sup>“Emergency aid granted to Chelsea; Weld gives \$960,000 to meet payroll; city to bring in financial specialists,” *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1991, Metro Region, p. 29.
- <sup>iv</sup>“Legislative panel backs Chelsea receivership,” *Boston Globe*, September 8, 1991, Metro Region, p. 1.
- <sup>v</sup>“Chelsea Receivership Asked; Weld takes unprecedented step for fiscally ailing city,” *Boston Globe*, September 6, 1991, Metro Region, p. 1.
- <sup>vi</sup>“Bulger predicts OK on receiver; Says he won’t fight Chelsea bill,” *Boston Globe*, September 11, 1991, Metro Region, p. 27.
- <sup>vii</sup>“Defeat of 2 ½ overrides seen; as reaction to hard times,” *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1991, Metro Region, p. 19.
- <sup>viii</sup>“Chelsea Receivership Asked; Weld takes unprecedented step for fiscally ailing city,” *Boston Globe*, September 6, 1991, Metro Region, p. 1.
- <sup>ix</sup>“Bulger predicts OK on receiver; Says he won’t fight Chelsea bill,” *Boston Globe*, September 11, 1991, Metro Region, p. 27.
- <sup>x</sup>“Chelsea Receivership Asked; Weld takes unprecedented step for fiscally ailing city,” *Boston Globe*, September 6, 1991, Metro Region, p. 1.
- <sup>xi</sup>Nick Pastore, “Who’s Really Soft on Drugs? Tobacco Stained Helms,” Op-ed in the *Hartford Courant*, August 15, 1997, <http://www.cipf.org/pubs/weldhelm.html>.
- <sup>xii</sup>Dick Lehr and Gerard O’Neill, (2000) *Black Mass: The Irish Mob, the FBI, and a Devil’s Deal* (New York, NY: Public Affairs).
- <sup>xiii</sup>“Labor panel cites Chelsea mayor,” *Boston Globe*, September 25, 1990, Metro Region, p. 21.
- <sup>xiv</sup>“Chelsea receiver halts overtime; Plans voter poll on annexation,” *Boston Globe*, September 14, 1991, Metro Region, p. 25.
- <sup>xv</sup>“Chelsea to get Receiver; House prevails with plan to guide city out of red ink,” *Boston Globe*, September 12, 1991, Metro/Region, p. 1.
- <sup>xvi</sup>“Chelsea Receivership Asked; Weld takes unprecedented step for fiscally ailing city,” *Boston Globe*, September 6, 1991, Metro Region, p. 1.
- <sup>xvii</sup>Lewis H. Spence, (August, 1995) *Reflections on the Prospects for Chelsea*, Final Report of the Receiver to the Massachusetts Legislature, p. 3.
- <sup>xviii</sup>Interview with the author.
- <sup>xix</sup>According to Steve McGoldrick and Dr. John Silber.
- <sup>xx</sup>Interview with the author.
- <sup>xxi</sup>Interview with the author.
- <sup>xxii</sup>Interview with the author.
- <sup>xxiii</sup>“Chelsea lifts housing subsidy embargo,” *Boston Globe*, January 18, 1990, Metro Region, p. 21.
- <sup>xxiv</sup>“Chelsea receiver halts overtime; Plans voter poll on annexation,” *Boston Globe*, September 14, 1991, Metro Region, p. 25.
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<sup>xxv</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xxvi</sup> “Bringing a Battered City Back from the Brink; Consensus-Building Process Inspires Citizen Involvement and a New Charter in Chelsea, Mass.,” *Washington Post*, September 7, 1994, First Section, p. A3.

<sup>xxvii</sup> “Probe not at end; More indictments expected of former Chelsea officials,” *Boston Globe*, September 24, 1992, Metro Region, p.1.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xxix</sup> Brian McGrory, “How to save a city,” *Boston Globe Magazine*, June 28, 1992, Pg. 12.

<sup>xxx</sup> According to interviews with Susan Podziba and Harry Spence.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Podziba, p. 19.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Spence, p. 23.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xxxix</sup> See Podziba (1998), Susan E. Hendrickson, and Edmund Beard, (March, 1993) *Governance Reform in Chelsea Massachusetts: Historical Analysis and Future Directions*, An Occasional Paper of the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs. University of Massachusetts at Boston.

<sup>xl</sup> “Bringing a Battered City Back from the Brink; Consensus-Building Process Inspires Citizen Involvement and a New Charter in Chelsea, Mass.,” *Washington Post*, September 7, 1994.

<sup>xli</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xlii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xliii</sup> “Legislative panel backs Chelsea receivership,” *Boston Globe*, September 8, 1991, Metro Region, p.1.

<sup>xliv</sup> Jean A. Riesman, (2002) *Planning and Narrative: Conspiracy, Exile and Resistance in Chelsea, Massachusetts*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

<sup>xl</sup> Riesman (2002).

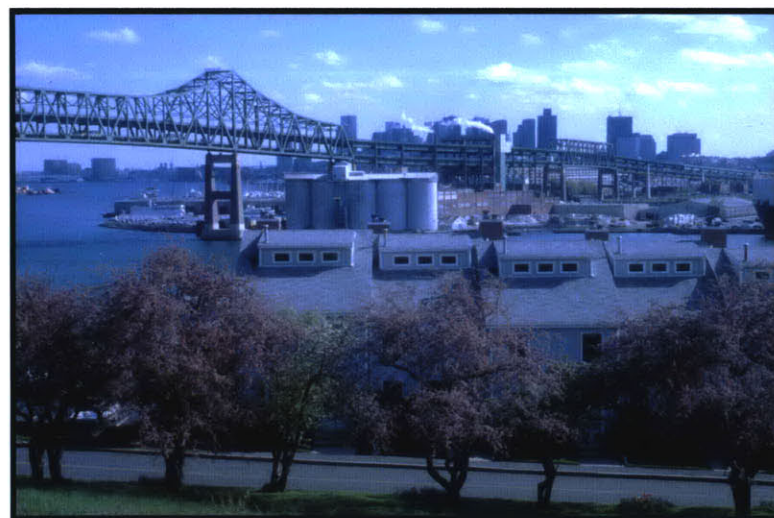
<sup>xlvi</sup> “Chelsea to get Receiver; House prevails with plan to guide city out of red ink,” *Boston Globe*, September 12, 1991, Metro Region, p. 1.

<sup>xlvi</sup> “Massport offers Chelsea a \$5 million deal,” *Boston Globe*, December 18, 1991, Metro Region, p.1.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Michael S. Lelyveld, “Fears Raised Over Massport's Offer to Chelsea,” *Journal of Commerce*, December 19, 1991, Maritime, p. 6B.

<sup>xlix</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>l</sup> Tax Increment Financing (TIF) - Massachusetts' version of Tax Increment Financing allows municipalities to provide flexible targeted incentives to stimulate job-creating development. The TIF Plan, completed by the municipality, describes proposed public and private investment in the TIF Zone, and is agreed upon by the municipality and all the private owners in the TIF Zone. The municipality and the prospective Certified Project candidate agree to a property tax exemption based on a percentage of the value added through new construction or significant improvement for a period of no less than five and no more than twenty years. From Massachusetts Office of Business Development website: <http://www.state.ma.us/mobd/edip.html>











# CHAPTER 3

## GAINS AND LOSSES

### The New Agenda

When the Massachusetts legislature enacted receivership in Chelsea, a host of local political obstacles, including entrenched organized crime and a patronage laden local government, obstructed development in the city. During receivership, the receivers restructured the local government, formulated a new city charter, and pushed forward a development agenda to overcome the “anti-development” attitude in the city. Why did the legislature choose to address these long standing issues in 1991? The underlying motive of the state administration in initiating development in Chelsea was to take control of a valuable parcel of real estate in the Boston metropolitan area, the 1.8 square mile city of Chelsea. The receivers rezoned Chelsea to allow airport related uses and to facilitate metropolitan growth, and they rewrote the city charter to cater to a market driven development process. Thus, the story does not end in August 1995, when receiver Harry Spence submitted his final report to the Massachusetts legislature. The receivers left behind a real estate oriented development process, institutionalized in the new city charter. As a result, while corruption and ethnic politics in the pre-receivership period in Chelsea were not serving the interests of the residents, the new charter and top-down approach provide little hope for a less elitist, or more inclusive system.

In the most recent “State of the City” report submitted by the current city manager Jay Ash, the new governmental philosophy is highlighted as, “...becoming a more open, responsive and responsible municipal government that not only hears the needs of its people, but develops and initiates efforts designed to address those needs in an honest, fair, equitable, accountable and cost-efficient manner, while never sacrificing good government for the benefit of those whose goals run counter to that of a ‘pro-Chelsea’ agenda.”<sup>i</sup> Who does the new city charter guard against?

The new charter protects the city from those who created what the receivers had called an “anti-development” attitude pervading the city before receivership. In part, this includes those associated with organized crime in Chelsea. Spence recalls that the first time criminal leaders appeared in front of the receivers was when he announced the economic development plan. According to Spence, crime needs a desperately poor town, not only to be less conspicuous, but also to attract fresh recruits. They certainly did not want business and industry in the city. In addition, according to Carol Gladstone, an assistant to the receiver in Community and Economic Development, a culture of victimization pervaded the city. Degrading industrial uses, the slow encroachment of Logan airport, and the history of the Tobin Bridge all contributed to a feeling of vulnerability to political manipulation that would not benefit the city.

Why did the receivers choose not to draw upon public participation in the planning process to overcome the ‘anti-development’ attitude in the city? Spence asserts that the corruption in the city administration was so widespread that the receivers believed

suspending the entire administration was central to success. “If you continued to give credit to some then they would take up *all* the [political] space. No one would step in to take the new places.”<sup>ii</sup> Furthermore, incorporation of public participation in the planning process would risk manipulation by corrupt interests. Accordingly, the consensus process and the new charter primarily reflected an approach to preventing restoration of a criminal regime.<sup>iii</sup> Thus, the receivers’ predefined solution involved overcoming the machine politics in Chelsea with a system more conducive to development and less susceptible to manipulation, which precluded rather than incorporated community participation. This solution condemned the entire community to exclusion from the planning process.

Bob Luongo, contends that ‘anti-development’ may be a slightly misplaced characterization of Chelsea pre-receivership. In the mid-1980’s a number of renewal projects spearheaded by the then redevelopment authority in Chelsea proved successful. Admiral’s Hill, a market rate residential development replaced the Naval Hospital, and the Mystic Shopping Mall recovered significant land close to the center of the city. He reflects that while municipal corruption and resistance to airport related uses hindered development, there was still development in the city. Luongo concludes that receivership was nevertheless good for the city. It provided stability, process, and an end to the patronage-laden system, but it was not the beginning of development.

Regardless, the receivers re-crafted the structure of city administration and approved the rezoning of city land. The structure of city administration was reconfigured to create a

more top-down system, as described earlier, but also to create a process oriented system with more emphasis on the division between executive and legislative functions in city governance. According to Ned Keefe, the Executive Director of Planning and Development in Chelsea, the city manager is an organizer and administrator while the council is responsible for policy. In actual practice these roles are very well delineated. In other words, all requests go through the city manager's office and all responses go back through the city manager's office. City councilors have less input on particular projects; rather, the council handles policy and hires the city manager.<sup>iv</sup> Essentially, the city manager runs the city.

Luongo recognizes that the city council has not become sophisticated enough to know how to use policy to make programs. Instead they continue to respond to constituent complaints about municipal services as is typical to get votes. Generally, it is harder to think in the systemic way. They could respond by saying there is a department in city hall responsible for handling your complaint, and focus their energy on crafting policies in line with desired programmatic results. With this approach the city councilors could countervail their limited access to projects with broader guidelines, requirements, and regulations.

Keefe asserts that the advantage of the new planning process in Chelsea is that it is not "through the back door." For Keefe, two positive contributions of receivership were breaking down barriers between municipal departments and the elimination of "fiefdoms." With greater communication between department heads, the developers can

rely on a staff-directed path that is set apart from the political system. With certainty of a process, developers can build in the risk and this makes Chelsea more attractive. While there can be no guarantee on the outcome, there is a guarantee on availability of a process and dialogue.

To put Chelsea on the ‘right’ track to development, the receivers took on the initiative of rezoning the city, rather than leaving it for the new administration. According to Carol Gladstone, assistant to the receiver in community and economic development, rezoning could not have been easier. “If we wanted to change zoning, we could just change it, we didn’t need city council approval.”<sup>v</sup> In contrast to other cities, by imposing receivership the zoning could simply be amended with the stamp of approval of the receiver. The rezoning of Chelsea consisted of three major initiatives, or anchor projects: the Everett Avenue Urban Renewal District, the Chelsea Waterfront District and Parkway Plaza. And rezoning made two major State projects possible during receivership. The first, a massive 400,000 square foot State administration building, the Massachusetts Information Technology Center (MITC) and the second a \$20 million five-story parking garage to support airport expansion with off-site employee parking, owned by Massport, but built with private capital.

The reconfiguration of city administration and the rezoning efforts facilitated the directive of economic development. In addition, Gladstone’s responsibility during her tenure in Chelsea was to grow the tax base with a “responsible” approach. This meant attracting higher value industrial uses to replace degrading industry on the waterfront and



attracting commercial development to the renewal areas. The strategy for attracting such uses has included negotiating with landowners to assemble site parcels and with potential developers over tax and financing. These initiatives continue today with a five-part economic development strategy. Described in the *State of the City Report*, the economic development strategy includes a tax incentive program, three urban renewal districts and a sector-based strategy.<sup>vi</sup> The sector strategy focuses on attracting businesses in five sectors: food production, health care (including biotech), back office support, airport related use, and support services (including printing, security, commissaries). Within this strategy, there is little requirement for public process.

The receivers left Chelsea with a spectrum of gains and losses. The receivers overcame the corruption and crime in the city's local government, and now, as Nadine Mironchuk, jokes, "The city is boring now because the government actually works."<sup>vii</sup> The city has gained a more stable tax base with the new development in the city. And the city administration is improving the municipal services.

On the other hand, the administration relies on state aid for 60-70% of the city budget.<sup>viii</sup> And, the long-term debt has risen to \$105 million.<sup>ix</sup> The greatest loss to city residents is that the new agenda for development in Chelsea relies on an administrative structure that impedes dialogue and fails to incorporate community participation into the structure of local governance. Receivership focused on the creating value in the city's land, but not in empowering the residents of the city. That is why the community must actively organize to assert their demands to the city administration.

The danger of allowing the market to take its own course is the low priority that the market accords to residential amenities. As Logan and Molotch describe in *Urban Fortunes*, when local government pursues a pro-growth agenda the use value of land is often compromised in lieu of exchange values.<sup>x</sup> The government becomes beholden to a private market driven development agenda. In Chelsea, officials already felt this was the case. According to Luongo, “The receivers never produced a large project, though they wanted to. The marketplace dictates, it’s no one’s fault. The government can only create opportunities, but they cannot *make* it happen. The receivers thought they could make it happen, that they could drive the process, but they couldn’t. A lot happened before receivership and during, but the market drives it.”<sup>xi</sup> Gladstone concurs, “The government can put together buyers and sellers and help the market function by putting together sites, but the market drives it.”<sup>xii</sup>

Lawrence Susskind describes the importance of citizen participation in land use planning with a case study of a project in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He concludes, “Land use planning is primarily a process of bargaining and conflict resolution. There are no right or wrong answers when it comes to describing how land ought to be used. Thus, the role of the land use planner is to structure situations in which negotiated settlements are possible. This is rarely accomplished by turning responsibility over to elected and appointed officials. While in theory they represent all the parties involved, they rarely have the capacity to stay in touch with all their constituents on every issue of importance.”<sup>xiii</sup> Likewise, in Chelsea, Massachusetts, although the City Manager and

Executive Director of Planning and Development may intend to represent resident interests in land use planning, the process itself impedes representation.

Although the receivers have justified the new governance structure as the only alternative to fix a broken system, the choices made reflect a normative idea about how to fix a corrupt political structure. In the case of Chelsea, the receivers believed that the solution for a corrupt political system was to institute a top-down governance structure that relies on a market driven approach to redevelopment and reduces the opportunity for local politics to interfere. The receivers defined the new agenda, without public deliberation, and the city administration continues to follow this model. I contend that the receivers overlooked the potential afforded by their unique position between the state agencies and the local constituencies. Though receivers had the opportunity to create a forum for negotiation between State government officials and agencies and the local constituencies, they limited their scope to meeting higher level State interests and neglected the role of local residents in redevelopment

In the interest of metropolitan growth and expansion of Logan International Airport, the receivers dedicated Chelsea land to airport related development. The receivers' choice to initiate development with airport related uses played a critical in prompting further development in the city. However, the decision did not account for residents' desires in the use of the waterfront property. More importantly, the receivers denied the residents the opportunity to negotiate with the city administration, the State government or Massport on the provisions of this crucial deal. Recently, in August 1998, Massport

signed an agreement with the city of Chelsea to research and attract airport-related development to Chelsea. Massport has committed to investing \$2.5 million dollars over a five-year period to this task.<sup>xiv</sup> Are there possibilities for community involvement in this next phase?

I argue that the primary motive of the receivers was to create a new process and administrative structure conducive to market driven development that would outlive the receivership. In the long run, their agenda facilitates metropolitan growth, not only for transportation purposes, but also for overall growth in the Boston metropolitan area. Chelsea is now positioned to accept the market driven commercial, industrial, and residential developments that accommodate growth close to Massachusetts' capital city. Without the new development friendly process in Chelsea, this growth potential might have been hindered.

## **Community Response**

Though the receivers failed to seek residential dialogue, community organizers took the opportunity of crisis and change in Chelsea to put forth their interests. The Chelsea Green Space and Recreation Committee, one such organization, remains one of the most active in Chelsea today. This organizing effort began before receivership supported by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Human Services. In 1986, the same year the BU-Chelsea Public Schools relationship was first considered, the Executive Office of Human Services convened the Chelsea Human Services Task Force. And a year later the task force drafted a 5-Year Human Services Plan for Chelsea and organized the Chelsea

Human Services Collaborative, an agency to carry out the Plan. By April 1988, the Collaborative secured funding for its first five years and shortly thereafter hired Ed Marakovitz as the Executive Director. The Collaborative hired local community organizers in Chelsea and forged alliances with local organizations. Meanwhile, community members were organizing against the BU-Chelsea Public Schools partnership and the City's Council for Hispanic Affairs. Thus, I would argue that community organizing in Chelsea today represents retaliation against the exclusion of public participation rather than the empowerment of the residents through the receivership.

The Latino community in Chelsea voiced opposition to the Boston University (BU) partnership with the Chelsea Public Schools, demanding that parents should be included in the decision making process. Faced with a less than friendly response and having to force translations of the meetings into Spanish, the Latino residents decided to organize. Since they felt that the City Council for Hispanic Affairs in City Hall was not serving their interests, residents decided to take matters into their own hands and they formed the Chelsea Council for Hispanic Affairs in 1989. The group chose two Latino residents to run for school committee positions in 1989, and one of them, Marta Rosa, won. Elated with this victory, the Council pushed forward. In summer 1991, the Council became aware that the State Legislature was considering imposing receivership on Chelsea. Realizing that the Secretary of Administration and Finance had formed an ad hoc committee to recommend a solution to deal with Chelsea's financial insolvency, the Council decided not to wait for an invitation to participate. A group of residents marched into the State House and demanded that Marta Rosa joins the Committee. The

Legislature agreed. Receivership followed shortly thereafter and the Council continued to voice their position on a number of key issues.

Close to the end of receivership in 1994, controversy in Chelsea over the siting of new public schools was giving way to a compromise, but at the expense of two of the city's largest parks. The Chelsea Human Services Collaborative, instigated by the Boston Globe Foundation and the Boston Natural Areas Fund, convened a meeting to propose a new committee to fight for open space. Thus, the Chelsea Green Space and Recreation Committee was established, and also funded by the Globe Foundation to hire a part-time coordinator by spring 1995. This Committee has become the most prominent activist organization within the city, taking on both environmental and political issues. While the Committee gained a reputation as a Latino organization in the early '90s, it has evolved to represent community-wide interests, cutting across racial divides. Most importantly, the nearly simultaneous emergence of the Chelsea Council for Hispanic Affairs and the Chelsea Human Services Collaborative gave foothold to a strong political voice for the Latino community, which receivership and City Hall did not provide.

While the Green Space and Recreation Committee has boasted a number of successes over the past decade, ranging from renovating city parks to beating back ordinances restricting outdoor public events, the new city administration still dictates land use. One blatant incident that reflected the power dynamic between the local government and the local constituencies occurred just after the new charter was in place and the first City Manager, Guy Santagate, took office. The Committee approached the Massachusetts

Water Resources Authority (MWRA) about the possibility that they turn over an unused parcel of their land to the City so that it could be redeveloped as a park under a pending open space bond bill in the State. With MWRA support confirmed, the Committee approached Senate President Birmingham to include the parcel in the bill. He agreed. Though the bond bill passed with Chelsea's funding included, Santagate suddenly changed his mind, deciding that the land should be used for business development. Though he relented to the Committee's demand that the application remain as planned, Jay Ash, the new Director of Planning and Development, would not allow it. Ash's insistence again rescinded Santagate's commitment and the land was set aside to develop a hotel. In this case, though the Committee initiated discussion with the MWRA, the city administration neglected to negotiate with the Committee over the parcel or provide compensation with another parcel.<sup>xv</sup>

Though the loss of the MWRA parcel represents only one battle among many, the episode provides instructive lessons. Chelsea's new charter supports top-down planning that prevails over the efforts of community organizations, rather than providing legitimacy to the residents' right to participate in city land use planning. In other words, the administration does not require any forum for negotiation in land use planning decisions. In order to gain influence, community organizations must seek alliances both within and external to the community, as described in the following example.

Two years later, the Committee took on a seemingly tenuous campaign. An oil company on the Chelsea waterfront had applied to the city for permits to convert their facilities to

an asphalt plant. The Chelsea Green Space and Recreation Committee knew that the zoning ordinances allowed this use and that a previous similar effort against such a plant in the City had lost in court. In this case, a coalition was formed that included the Board of Health and a local Waterfront Association. While the Committee organized rallies and marches, the Board of Health organized a public hearing. At the hearing, the coalition was prepared with testimony, and as Marakovitz notes, “But by far the most moving testimony came from Chelsea residents living near the oil company. They presented horrifying descriptions of keeping their windows closed all summer because of the smell, of trucks rumbling through the neighborhood around the clock, of oil coated windows and laundry and more.”<sup>xvi</sup> The Board of Health soon declared the facility a “noisome” trade, and the City prepared for a court challenge. Before the issue could be contested in court, State Representatives from Revere and Chelsea put forward a bill that banned asphalt storage in the two cities. In spring 1998, the legislature passed the bill and it was signed into law.

A critical issue that emerges is that the case against the asphalt plant brought to the table a wider range of interests, which was central to the success of the effort. Through dialogue, partnership and negotiation, the campaign succeeded. The value of a community organization that can influence wider participation among powerful stakeholders should not be underestimated. Yet, it is important to consider under what conditions the Green Space and Recreation Committee will be able to intervene. Certain issues lend themselves to the support of wider constituencies, especially environmental and quality of life issues, these are poised for greater success. In general, the



Committee's success will depend on alliances within and external to the city. If community organizations are able to frame their concerns in terms of the larger welfare of the city or region, they are more likely to influence planning decisions, whereas narrowly defined, place-based demands fail to garner the wider support required. The greater challenge lies in institutionalizing a voice for marginalized members of the city, when powerful partners are not interested. A forum for dialogue and negotiation could reveal opportunities for more equitable planning that are not otherwise obvious.

Currently, the Chelsea Green Space and Recreation Committee collaborates with a wide network of organizations and agencies, both in the Boston Metropolitan Area and nationwide. More recently, the Committee identifies with the global environmental justice movement. Most importantly, the Committee has gained a wealth of institutional learning, in terms of accessing agencies, government officials, and the legal system to put forward demands. In addition, members have developed skills in securing funding, sifting through public policy and using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other technical tools. These strengths will continue to build the power of the group. As the group makes gains, the Committee and other organizations in Chelsea must consider the importance of creating broad alliances to influence planning decisions and overcome fundamental disparities in power in the City.

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<sup>i</sup> Chelsea State of the City Report, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>ii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>iii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>iv</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>v</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>vi</sup> Chelsea State of the City Report, 2002.

<sup>vii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>viii</sup> According to Andy DeSantis, Assistant Director, Chelsea Department of Public Works.

<sup>ix</sup> Massachusetts Municipal Profiles, 2001-2002. Palo Alto, CA: Information Publications.

<sup>x</sup> John R. and Logan, Harvey L. Molotch, (1987) *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).

<sup>xi</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xii</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>xiii</sup> Lawrence Susskind, (1977) *The Importance of Citizen Participation and Consensus-Building in the Land Use Planning Process*, Environmental Impact Assessment Project, Laboratory of Architecture and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, p. 39.

<sup>xiv</sup> Shailesh N. Gongal, (1999) *How Will the Urban Ring Impact Airport Related Economic Activities and Low Income Communities in Chelsea?* Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, p.10.

<sup>xv</sup> Ed Marakovitz, (June, 1998) *Environmental Organizing in Chelsea: The Green Space and Recreation Committee*, Chelsea Human Services Collaborative.

<sup>xvi</sup> Marakovitz (June 1998).



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# CHAPTER 4

## METROPOLITANISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

### **Rethinking Progress**

The parallels between the Progressive movement and the reform of Chelsea inspire questions regarding the possibilities that both reforms missed. The Progressives intended to return democracy to the local communities by overcoming the patronage-laden machine politics in local governance with a more business-like administration isolated from politics. Yet, the movement facilitated the private sector interests, while subordinating the role of local communities in planning processes. According to John Buenker, this resulted not simply from oversight, but also from the exclusion of a large portion of the urban population, the immigrant working class.<sup>i</sup> Thus, perhaps the Progressive movement has been mis-characterized as “bottom up” and the outcomes represent not only unforeseen consequences, but also the result of the bias of middle class interests.

In the case of Chelsea, the apparent difference from the Progressive movement was that the receivers initiated a consensus process to explicitly involve the community in rewriting the city charter. However, the design of the local government structure to facilitate efficiency, but exclude public participation was the same. Why were the results of Chelsea’s reform not different from the reforms of the Progressives one century

earlier? I argue that the receivers employed a consensus process not to 'return democracy,' but to pave the way for a new charter and administration that would be more amenable to the metropolitan agenda for growth. While the efforts to facilitate metropolitan growth brought increased tax revenue to the city and removed a corrupt political structure, the receivers focused on metropolitan issues and excluded local concerns. In other words, while a number of developments initiated by the receivers serve the interests of metropolitan uses alone, with indirect benefits to Chelsea residents, there are few, if any, developments from the receivership that cater to local interests alone.

As a consequence of the reform of Chelsea, what can we expect in the impact on city planning? Returning to the literature on the Progressive Era, what can be gleaned from the outcomes of the Progressive movement on city planning? The academic focus on the outcomes of the Progressive Era has been limited to evaluations of the political and sociological implications of the movement. As a political measure to overcome corruption, the reforms have been well received by city administrators, as is evident in the model of the 'professional' local governance that continues till today.<sup>ii</sup> But, beyond the actual or perceived political success of the Progressive reforms, can the movement be considered a planning success? To address this question, the relationship between planning and politics must be examined.

Kevin Mattson in *Creating a Democratic Public* begins by describing the 'City Beautiful' movement that coincided with the Progressive Era. The City Beautiful movement



involved the active participation of local residents in the development of public spaces in their cities and towns. Mattson emphasizes that, “With the dawning of the Progressive Era, leaders of the City Beautiful movement developed visions of an urban public as an active association of equal citizens.”<sup>iii</sup> In other words, both the engagement of the public in city design and the spaces created by the movement engendered a local democratic citizenry. However, in the context of rapid urbanization and changing relationships between urban and suburban settlements, Mattson suggests, “If a public capable of willing collective decisions was a necessary component of democracy, the question became: How to create such a public within modern urban settings?”<sup>iv</sup> During the Progressive Era, a strong relationship existed between politics and local planning. However, following the Progressive Era, with the growth of urban areas, the relationship became less explicit.

According to Mattson, a new form of public participation in the governance of the growing urban areas would be essential to maintaining democracy. Activists involved in the less successful social centers movement, that challenged the ideology of the ‘reformers’ during the Progressive Era, advocated this, but they lost out to the reformers. In the social centers movement, activists and intellectuals promoted the need for institutionalizing forums that engender democratic activity through dialogue, debates, and gatherings. The death of this movement, according to Mattson, precluded “real democracy” in the United States. Mattson concludes that, “In the minds of many intellectuals writing during the 1920s, democracy had to give way to the pressures of a ‘mass society’ – a society bulldozing any resistance in its way. Whereas community was

the source of local democratic deliberation for social centers activists, for intellectuals in the 1920s ‘community’ became a dying artifact – something swallowed up by large, bureaucratic institutions.”<sup>v</sup> Mattson describes the relationship between the local planning efforts of the City Beautiful movement and the political ethos of the Progressive Era. He makes clear that the transformation of the American urban landscape made the local institutions for democracy less relevant and that the Progressives failed to design new institutions for democracy that accommodated the emerging nature of the urban metropolis.

I argue that the Progressives’ focus on administrative efficiency as a path to democracy not only precluded democratic institutions, but also resulted in a disjointed history of planning regarding local community planning efforts and higher-level government planning initiatives. The Progressives introduced the concept of a metropolitan government to accommodate the transforming nature of the urban and suburban landscape at that time. Metropolitan government posed a solution to the dilemma of dealing with fragmented local governments while trying to create economies of scale and pursue infrastructure projects that required cooperation among local governments. This solution focused on generating efficiency in metropolitan planning, while overcoming political tensions. And the formulation of the solution to metropolitan obstacles was pursued separately from the reforms for municipal governments. As a result, academic studies of local planning remain distinct from the study of metropolitan, state or national planning. The tension between local and higher level planning has been addressed in

terms of conflict or coordination, but not in terms of opportunities for institutionalizing joint planning processes.

In Chelsea, the tensions between local and metropolitan planning are critical. Given the City's value in the Boston metropolitan area, a significant portion of Chelsea's land is allocated to uses that serve metropolitan needs. The formulation of planning processes that allow the local community to reconcile their demands with the metropolitan authorities remains critical. Thus, in rethinking the Progressive Era, it seems that the reformers failed to facilitate a more democratic local government structure partially due to the disconnected nature of planning that emerged between the metropolitan agencies and local constituents and their failure to resolve this tension.

## **The Metropolitan Community**

How have planning theorists addressed planning processes for local communities that face the pressure of metropolitan growth? Community planning studies often focus the possibilities for organizing a particular local community around their interests. However, the scope for partnership between local constituencies and metropolitan planning agencies has been sparsely addressed. Studies regarding the relationship between a local community and higher level planning have been limited to understanding either the extent to which the metropolitan, state or federal institutions and policies influence the local community, or the efforts of community mobilization to protest against metropolitan plans. The concept of a metropolitan government that overcomes political fragmentation to achieve higher efficiency in planning and delivery of services has been widely

promoted. However, in both the community planning literature and the metropolitan government literature, the relationship between the local and higher level is one of attrition, without cooperative dialogue. Little attention has been given to the creation of a formalized process of dialogue between the local community and higher-level institutions. Between the different relationships of community and metropolitan stakeholders to metropolitan plans there must be a forum to negotiate interests and recognize the legitimacy of different claims. The gap between literature on community planning and metropolitan planning reveals a critical juncture for further research.

The study of communities and their relationship to higher-level agencies has been limited to an understanding of the extent to which the policies of higher-level government agencies or departments are manifested at the local level. This provides valuable insight into the constraints and inputs of higher levels that influence local activity by facilitating or precluding behavior of local units within the community. Roland Warren attributes the increasingly hierarchical structures of governance and the private sector to the necessity of thinking in terms of structural relationships between the units within a community and higher levels of authority in his 1978 book, *The Community in America*. Warren points out that the tendency to consolidate the local community into a unit of analysis has resulted in isolated studies of communities that tend to disregard the political and economic forces of larger society within the communities. Thus, Warren argues for less stress on a geographic area as a focus of analysis and more on the linkages of units within a community both horizontally (between units within a locale) and vertically (with “extra-community” or higher level units).

Warren's underlying concern dealt with why local communities often fail to organize their resources to meet local needs. He asserts that, at least partly, linkages between the community and higher levels of government preclude the ability for local communities to resolve local dilemmas independently. Warren argues that, "Much important behavior that takes place at the community level takes place within units, groups, companies, and other entities that themselves are integral parts of larger state or national systems. It is a thesis of this book that such units often are more closely related to these larger systems than to other components of the local community."<sup>vi</sup> Thus, the reliance on higher-level policy formulation, funding, or authority, is paramount to the effective functioning of the local units.

In a more detailed case study, John Mollenkopf illustrates the dynamic between higher-level government policies on cities and towns in *The Contested City*. Mollenkopf describes the Democratic Party's use of Federal money to fund urban programs, beginning with the New Deal, thereby gaining the political support of the urban electorate. In this context, "new machines" or agencies were created to foster the cooperation between the Federal programs and the local level. Yet, the framework led to new conflicts and a failure to address urban social problems because of the fragmented and complex institutional and agency structures. Thus, there was less accountability and political and economic coherence in the intergovernmental program delivery. He also recognizes that the traditional liberal approach "tends to ignore the accountability of these development interests to the neighborhoods, underemployed minority groups, or the

public interest as a whole, who are supposed to benefit from growth.”<sup>vii</sup> As a result, government intervention in fact “undermined the economic and political supports upon which that intervention depended.”<sup>viii</sup>

In Mollenkopf’s study, the renewal of distressed inner cities relied on private investment. Mollenkopf highlights the Federal role in coalition building and directing local development through their programs, showing how government could “accelerate and direct market forces.” Though institutions and agencies to approve redevelopment schemes were developed in order to incorporate community interests, the effort in fact led to perverse results. Only the most profitable and politically well backed “can pierce such a tangled web.” In other words, the private sector interests were most likely to voice their demands and control the processes of redevelopment. Thus, the government served primarily as a facilitator while market forces still dominated the outcomes in land use transformation. While Mollenkopf elucidates the critical links between the Federal programs and the urban outcomes, the implications on the relationship between local constituencies and higher-level government programs are not considered. For example, could the Democratic Party have pursued other choices in terms of building coalitions such that they would not have had to compromise their effort to meet the demands of urban constituencies by succumbing to private sector interests? Again, the possibility for building political power and forging new partnerships between the local constituencies and the higher-level agencies is not considered.

While Mollenkopf analyzes the impact Federal level programs have on the urban setting, Stephen Gregory describes the challenge that local constituencies pose to metropolitan planners in *Black Corona*. Gregory describes a metropolitan planning proposal for construction of an elevated train running between Manhattan's Upper East Side and New York's John F. Kennedy and La Guardia airports, cutting through a number of neighborhoods, including Astoria, Corona, and East Elmhurst in Queens, New York. Gregory describes the active efforts of the constituencies in these neighborhoods, but recognizes that the organizations are effectively place-based. Though they voice concerns for the larger regional issues, the activities of the organizations are generally limited to their communities, thus broader coalitions do not form over the area-wide concerns. Gregory points out that though there was initially hope for political alignment among the neighborhoods of East Elmhurst and Astoria to fight the project together, the State planners managed to divide the groups by proposing a compromise with East Elmhurst, but not with Astoria. This tactic effectively changed the stakes of each group in their fight against the project. "For neighborhood activists faced with a daunting array of issues and problems at disparate institutional sites, political struggles are not 'won' and 'lost' in momentous confrontations between neatly arrayed adversaries. 'You have to compromise,' Barbara Coleman explained to [Gregory]."<sup>ix</sup> This conclusion, on the part of neighborhood activists, reflects their ultimate concern with the immediate space of the neighborhood over the larger issues of the city. When the city authorities offer a compromise with one local constituency, they tend to accept it, rather than deny it on the basis of a larger regional demand.

Meanwhile, residents from the Upper East Side framed their concerns regarding environmental issues, economic feasibility, and accessibility in a strictly regional context. In addition, the Manhattan residents were able to build support with powerful allies in the City and afford the heavy fees for professional review of the proposal. Ultimately, when the proposal failed, the Manhattan constituency was recognized for their larger regional concerns, while the residents of Queens were represented as local. “This class-based capacity to formulate and authoritatively present neighborhood interests... was not available to the activists in Queens. Their lack of access to legal representation, research support, and other ‘instruments of perception and expression’ impeded their ability to present their claims to environmental justice with authority and to articulate their specific, place-bound interests within the framework of a systems-level evaluation and critique of the AGT proposal.”<sup>x</sup> Thus, Gregory elucidates the differential access between local constituencies to influencing metropolitan planning, based on class advantages and allies. This provides a critical insight into the relationship between different local constituencies and higher level planning. How can the metropolitan planning process facilitate negotiation with local constituents who are often barred from participating?

While academics have acknowledged the extent to which higher-level government impacts local planning and limits on community access to metropolitan planning, how does the literature regarding metropolitan planning address local communities? From the perspective of metropolitan planners, the solution to effective planning requires overcoming the fragmented political structure with a metropolitan or regional government. Gerald Frug proposes a metropolitan government that institutionalizes



representation from the cities and towns will overcome the current fragmented approach to planning. And, by including a number of constituents from each city or town, different class and ethnic interests could be addressed.<sup>xi</sup> In this simple formulation, Frug overlooks the need for a process that brings forth the affected local constituencies for each metropolitan planning issue in a venue for dialogue and negotiation. Rather, he expects local representatives to speak for the interests of diverse resident groups. Frug's argument echoes early proponents of metropolitan governance. As Stephens and Wikstrom note in *Metropolitan Government and Governance*, "In essence, then, according to these early scholars, *the fundamental problem of the metropolis* was the decentralized or fractionated nature of local government."<sup>xii</sup> To overcome this, unification and leadership rather than greater dialogue or new partnerships were espoused as the solution.

The underpinnings of the metropolitan government concept evolved from the municipal reform movement of the Progressive Era. The reform movement promoted government efficiency through structural changes, including greater distinction between administration and politics, by endeavoring to conduct public administration in a business like fashion. At the same time, rapid development of metropolitan areas at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, instigated consideration of the proper government structure to manage the transforming urban areas. "By the early 1930s social scientists were in agreement that a metropolitan area might be described as an integrated economic and social unit with a large population base, encompassing a significant expanse of geographical territory."<sup>xiii</sup> This formulation of the metropolitan area as an 'integrated unit' that would benefit from a

set of efficient planning solutions underestimates the value of negotiating between internally differentiated constituencies. Because local constituencies vary in their access to participating in and responding to governmental initiatives, I argue that the critical issue is how to encourage negotiation between local constituents and higher-level interests within the governance structure.

Warren, Rosentraub and Weschler point out that, “Attention is seldom given to the interrelationships of governing processes and structures at the neighborhood, city, and metropolitan scales. To systematically assess the future of any urban area, all three scales must be defined and their linkages be considered as integral elements of a single system of governance.”<sup>xiv</sup> They deliver a framework for thinking about urban governance into the 1990s, but since then, little progress has been made on this issue.

Whether or not Chelsea will be considered a planning success as a result of the receivership and redevelopment of the city remains to be seen. Analysis of the planning outcomes in Chelsea as the new agenda takes root may not only answer this question, but also begin to address a critical gap in the literature between community planning and metropolitan planning.

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<sup>i</sup>John D. Buenker, (1973) *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.), p. 198.

<sup>ii</sup>The council manager form of government is the single most popular form of government in cities over 10,000 in population. This form of government represents over 100 million citizens in the US. More than 75% local governments adopt this plan each year. Source: Independent Commission Against Corruption, Sydney, Australia.

<sup>iii</sup>Kevin Mattson, (1998) *Creating A Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy During the Progressive Era* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press), p. 16.

<sup>iv</sup>Mattson, p. 15.

<sup>v</sup>Mattson, p. 126.

<sup>vi</sup>Roland L. Warren, (1978) *The Community in America* (Rand McNally College Publishing Company), p. 15.

<sup>vii</sup>John Mollenkopf, (1983) *The Contested City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 280.

<sup>viii</sup>Mollenkopf, p. 3.

<sup>ix</sup>Stephen Gregory, (1998), *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 216.

<sup>x</sup>Gregory, p. 227.

<sup>xi</sup>Based on a talk given by Gerald Frug at a student forum at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on May 2, 2002.

<sup>xii</sup>Stephens, G. Ross and Nelson Wikstrom. (2000) *Metropolitan Government and Governance: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Analysis, and the Future* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), p. 35.

<sup>xiii</sup>Stephens and Wikstrom, p. 32.

<sup>xiv</sup>Robert Warren, Mark S. Rosentraub and Louis F. Weschler. (1992) *Building Urban Governance: An Agenda for the 1990s*, Journal of Urban Affairs, Volume 14, No. 3/4, p. 411.











# CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

In 1991, the Massachusetts State Legislature proclaimed the City of Chelsea, Massachusetts, bankrupt to justify their decision to place the City under state receivership. In fact, the situation was far more complex. Organized crime, administrative corruption, and metropolitan interests influenced the State Legislature's decision to enact receivership. The state-appointed receivers furthered a metropolitan agenda for growth and development by instituting a top-down, market driven development process. Though the receivers claimed that they would 'return democracy' to the community and initiated a consensus process among residents to rewrite the local city charter, they did not institutionalize public participation in the new government structure. The receivers believed that public participation would hinder development. This, in turn, would compromise the metropolitan goals.

The new government structure in Chelsea has been portrayed as successful in the media and in academic reports for overcoming corruption in local politics.<sup>i</sup> However, from a planning perspective, the reform of Chelsea cannot be considered a success. The receivers improved the situation in Chelsea through municipal reforms that were driven by efficiency, market driven development, and metropolitan planning. This approach to reform has been widely discussed and developed in academic literature. However, the receivers failed to innovate in the gap where planning literature falls short, the juncture



between local and metropolitan planning. The receivership of Chelsea was a unique opportunity to innovate in this intersection. However, alternatives that could dramatically alter community participation in local governance were never explored, thereby sacrificing the potential to pursue a more innovative model of “returning democracy” to municipal administration, and bringing together local and metropolitan constituents in a planning process.

The reform of Chelsea echoes the reforms that resulted from the Progressive movement. Theorists have not directly addressed the outcomes of the Progressive movement reforms on local and metropolitan planning. However, the receivership and redevelopment of Chelsea provides insights that provoke rethinking the Progressive Era. I propose that reformers failed to facilitate a more democratic local government structure partially due to the disconnected nature of planning that emerged between the metropolitan agencies and local constituents and their failure to resolve this tension. They failed to recognize that metropolitan growth required forging new partnerships between metropolitan agencies and local constituencies. Further research regarding these issues could illuminate lessons of the Progressive Era and lead to possibilities for new forms of urban governance.

Lincoln Steffens, a journalist who commented on the Progressive reforms, concludes his autobiography with the insistence that it is impossible to rise above politics and still maintain democracy. The presence of politics allows communities to consider more

equitable solutions to resource allocation by listening to the demands of different groups within the city.

## **Planning Lessons**

What role can the planners play when faced with the tension between local interests and metropolitan interests? First, the planner must recognize the distinction between the metropolitan and the local goals, realizing that one may not necessarily benefit the other. Yet, constituents are often myopic in their agendas. In such cases, local and metropolitan planners may play a lead role in negotiating between the local and metropolitan stakeholders. On the other hand, the metropolitan and local agendas may rely on one another to move forward. In Chelsea, the State intervention offered the City a means to overcome crime and corruption that had stagnated city development, and to attract new investment and interest in the city. And, the metropolitan agenda for airport expansion relied on development in Chelsea and the zoning approval of airport related uses to meet its goals. Though local and metropolitan aims facilitated one another, the constituents worked at odds with one another, rather than in cooperation. At the least, planners may better articulate the local and metropolitan stakes more clearly. More ambitiously, planners may provide a link that brings the disparate interests and powers together in negotiation.

Local constituents in some cases manage to influence metropolitan plans, and in others they are barred from even voicing their concerns. Accessibility to metropolitan planning often depends on class-based advantages that include powerful alliances and ability to

afford both time and professional fees to participate in the planning process. Meanwhile, less wealthy constituents are often neglected as place-based and not interested in larger welfare issues. In Chelsea, community organizations initially lacked the means to forge broader alliances and the receivers did not regard their voice as essential to local planning. Planners must design institutions that allow marginalized constituencies to join in higher level alliances such that place-based concerns come across not only as either “not in my backyard” reactions or as narrow neighborhood based demands, but as critical to the success of regional goals.

As Susskind points out, “The traditional approaches to citizen involvement presume that the land use planner is a technician working for or as a consultant to a public agency or elected official.” Whereas, “Consensus building depends on the ability of the planner to bring all the parties to the bargaining table and to keep them there long enough to develop a shared commitment to the success of the group.”<sup>ii</sup> Planners must create such opportunities, rather than limit themselves to a subordinate technical role.

Finally, while every community strives to improve quality of life, the threats of gentrification and displacement must not be underestimated. While residents may invest considerable efforts in city amenities, it may trigger a perverse result, and they may eventually find the cost of land unaffordable. If a movement facilitates efficient functioning of the economy, without creating a means for more equal power relations, the scope for equity and access in land use will remain limited.

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<sup>i</sup> See Podziba (1998) and Hendrickson and Beard (1993).

<sup>ii</sup> Susskind, p. 39.



# LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

*"What we see in ordinary vision is modified in our perceptions by what we think we see."*

- Oliver Wendell Holmes

p. 1:                   no. 1    Welcome  
                          no. 2    to Chelsea

*"Bringing forward, that is, what was invisible to the eyes, which see only the products, the commodities of labor."*

- Alan Trachtenberg on Lewis Hine

p. 23               no. 3    Boston  
                          no. 4    Chelsea

p. 24               no. 5    From Sea  
                          no. 6    to  
                          no. 7    Shining Sea

p. 25               no. 8    Together  
                          no. 9    We  
                          no. 10   Stand

p. 26               no. 11   Neighborhood  
                          no. 12   Housing  
                          no. 13   Support

*"A silence...gratefully contrasting with the surrounding tumult of form conveyed to me a new sentiment. There is around these summits the soundlessness of a vacuum."*

- Clarence King

p. 52               no. 14   View\*  
                          no. 15   the Landscape\*  
                          no. 16   Out to Sea\*

p. 53               no. 17   Expectations\*  
                          no. 18   Filled\*

p. 54               no. 19   Park  
                          no. 20   and Go\*

p. 55               no. 21   From enterprise  
                          no. 22   to Enterprise

*"Form is henceforth divorced from matter. In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped."*

- Oliver Wendell Holmes

p.71               no. 23   From a Distance  
                          no. 24   At Your Doorstep

p. 72               no. 25   Patterns  
                          no. 26   of Our Lives

p.73               no. 27   Welcome to  
                          no. 28   Our Community

p. 74               no. 29   One Man's Junk  
                          no. 30   Another Man's Treasure

*"They tended to view the world itself as a work of art, free of poverty, real labor and conflict."*

- Alan Trachtenberg on Lewis Hine

p. 88               no. 31   Near or Far  
                          no. 32   Far or Near

p. 89               no. 33   Repeating  
                          no. 34   Frames

p. 90               no. 35   Promises  
                          no. 36   Promises

p. 91               no. 37   Open  
                          no. 38   Ended

*"Men will hunt all curious, beautiful, grand objects, as they hunt the cattle in South America, for their skins, and leave the carcasses as of little worth."*

- Oliver Wendell Holmes

p. 97               no. 39   For  
                          no. 40   Sale

All photographs taken by the author unless otherwise noted.

\*Photographs by Meg Flynn

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A: PHOTOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

### THE PHOTO ESSAY

*“I play many photographs against each other until the fragmentary statement of two or more complete each other, or between them say more than their added up meanings.”*

*- Minor White<sup>2</sup>*

This photo essay tells a story that runs parallel to and weaves in and out of the text of this thesis. The photographs were left untitled and uncaptioned, purposefully. It is left to the reader to reflect on the images while reading the thesis. Through this process, new interpretations may replace the initial instinct. The possibility is left open for the photographs to inform the text, rather than vice versa. The photographs may raise more questions than they answer.

The theme of the photo essay is to describe the disjunction between metropolitan and local land use planning and the consequent exclusion of local constituencies in planning processes. This has partially resulted from catering land use planning processes to market driven development. The photographs provide a visceral sense of what this can mean to a community.

After forming an impression of the photo essay, the reader may read the titles and themes in the List of Photographs to understand my interpretation and logic behind the construction of the photo essay. These are placed at the end of the thesis so that they do not distract from the text of the thesis, and to allow the reader to form an independent interpretation, uninhibited by my understanding and perspective.

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<sup>2</sup>Vicki Goldberg, ed., (1981) *Photography in Print*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico), p.399.



## PHOTOGRAPHY AND PLANNING

*“The photographer’s act is to see the outside world precisely, with intelligence as well as sensuous insight. This act of seeing sharpens the eye to an unprecedented awareness. He often sees swiftly an entire scene that most people pass unnoticed.”*

*- Bernice Abbott<sup>3</sup>*

In the field of urban planning, the use of photography has predominantly been limited to illustrative purposes. Planners use photography to emphasize a particular point or provide visual ‘evidence’ to a narrative. And, in some cases photography has been used to articulate concepts or ideas that are difficult to describe in words. However, the visual component is often regarded as supplemental, and not as a component of the document with a mode of logic of its own. In this section, I describe a selection of examples in which the uses of photography in planning and policy making exceed the illustrative purpose, and identify a critical area for further research and integration.

One of the best known examples of using photography to influence public policy was demonstrated by Roy Stryker during his tenure with the Farm Security Administration (FSA, 1935-1943). Stryker, an economist with a keen perception for the power of visual material, employed a group of photographers to document depressed areas in the United States. He insisted that his photographers understand the significance of the areas they visited and required detailed field notes describing the photographs they were taking.

Dorothea Lange, one of the best known photographers who worked under Strkyer, immortalized both her photographs and her documentation. In *American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*, Lange and captioned a series of photographs with words that she had noted as spoken by her subjects. Paul Schuster Taylor, Lange’s husband, recalls the power of the integration of text and photography and its influence on policy makers. “In his hand [Rural Rehabilitation Director,] Drobish held a report recommending construction of camps for migratory laborers, documented with photographs. After these photographs were passed around the table, the commission voted \$200,000 to initiate the program. The question was not raised again, why a photographer.”<sup>4</sup>

The work of the FSA photographers presented visual photography alongside written documentation to effect policy change, the use of the visual was primarily limited to articulating

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<sup>3</sup> Golberg, p. 255

what the statistics failed to report: the lived reality of post-depression labor conditions. However, in this project the photographers were constrained, “In that project photographers were given shooting scripts from which to work...and had no control over how the pictures might be cropped, arranged, and captioned, their position was similar to that of photo-journalists working for the commercial press – a situation that both [Walker] Evans and Lange found particularly distasteful.”<sup>5</sup>

The FSA photographs influenced policy and raised social awareness. In urban planning, how can photography be employed to articulate planning concepts that are difficult to describe in words? Until now, photographs have primarily been limited to illustrative purposes in planning. For example, a description of transit-oriented development or gentrification may be supplemented with photographs that represent different manifestations of these concepts in the built environment. In this context, urban designers have relied heavily on photography and other visual aids to put forth and debate design concepts and proposals. However, photography may play a more active role in planning than illustration. Photographs capture what cannot always be articulated in words through a visual language.

In *The Language of Landscape*, Anne Whiston Spirn introduces the concept that landscapes speak in their own language. She describes language of landscape in terms of grammar and the expressions they offer in terms of poetry. The link Spirn draws between the dynamic nature of landscapes and their deep historical roots emphasizes the importance of understanding the landscape in its current manifestation as the embodiment of the forces that produced it. Spirn draws this relationship out not only in terms of natural landscapes and the geologic process that shape them, but also in terms of urban landscapes and the human endeavors that produce the results we live with.

The recognition that humans have manufactured the landscapes of our cities has been extended to analyses of larger social forces that define the landscapes. D.W. Meinig notes in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, “Landscape is a common word which is increasingly used to encompass an ensemble of ordinary features which constitute an extraordinarily rich

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<sup>4</sup>Goldberg, p. 357

<sup>5</sup>Naomi Rosenblum, (1997, third edition) *A World History of Photography*, (New York, NY: Abbeville Press), p. 367-369.

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exhibit of the course and character of any society.”<sup>6</sup> Thus a new link is forged between economic, political and cultural forces and the transformation of landscape.

Related to the production of space and the built environment, Sharon Zukin asserts in *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* that, “Certainly the inscription of capital in space maps new forms of social control. But these forms are not predetermined.”<sup>7</sup> If urban forms are not predetermined, then what is the role of local political agency in the construction of an urban landscape? Studies of politics and space have focused on a macro-scale view of the political economy of the production of space. There has been a gap in the literature in addressing spatial outcomes of a city based on local land use planning structures and the politics that lead to new developments. To what extent is the landscape of a city influenced by the local political structure and planning processes? This is one area for further research.

The integration of photography and planning holds great potential to forge links between the environments we live in and the planning processes that define these landscapes. To some extent the lack of integration between the visual understanding of the city and political or economic analyses represents the larger chasm we face in planning between institutions and the built form. This integration could bridge the communication between physical planners and policy makers and perhaps lead to the creation of institutions that encourage wider human agency in the conceptualization and creation of our environments.

Further, planners may use the photographic process itself to instruct their understanding of local planning and policy. In this thesis, I have interspersed the photographs throughout the text. I have attempted to emphasize the text with the visual articulation, but in addition, the photographic process influenced my research. What I learned through interviews and documentation became more apparent as I photographed the landscape of Chelsea, and what I gleaned from the landscape instructed my research.

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<sup>6</sup>D.W. Meinig, ed., (1979) *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscape*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), p.2.

<sup>7</sup>Sharon Zukin, (1991) *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. 274.

# THE VISUAL INVESTIGATION

*“What you have got are not photographers. They’re a bunch of sociologists with cameras.”*

*- Ansel Adams<sup>8</sup>*

Photography was used as a primary medium of inquiry for this thesis. One purpose of pursuing a visual investigation alongside academic research into the political and planning issues was to stimulate research questions from the visual landscape. Thus, rather than first conduct research into the planning processes of Chelsea, Massachusetts, and subsequently illustrate my findings and conclusions, I used the process of taking the photographs to raise questions for my research.

My interest in Chelsea stemmed from visual questions. I noticed that the landscape was changing in Chelsea with new developments that were possibly signs of gentrification. I suspected that with the skyrocketing rents in Boston and the gentrification of Charlestown, just across the Tobin Bridge from Chelsea, that Chelsea would be a likely candidate for residents and businesses to turn to next. Once I learned about the charter consensus process, I hypothesized that gentrification would take a different turn in this city. I hoped to capture visually how the landscape of Chelsea reflected a different planning process. I began the investigation with my camera.

As I roamed the City searching for signs of a different land use planning process, I found little that seemed unique. I had preconceived notions that a community planning process in a distressed city would create vibrant public spaces and generate investment in low-income housing and local businesses. My exploration was initiated with a bias, but this was quickly broken down. Since I found little that was ‘different,’ I began my interviews with questions about why this was the case. City and State officials revealed that the consensus process was limited to rewriting the city charter, and this process did not institutionalize new forms of public participation in the local government. My research then shifted towards questions of why a consensus process, why receivership, and what does this mean to development. This turn freed me from the assumptions with which I was operating in taking photographs.

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<sup>8</sup> Goldberg, p. 352.

I then pursued both the photography and the research simultaneously. As I explored Chelsea with my camera, I simply took photographs of what appealed to me, struck me or inspired me. I then developed the film and asked what the photographs reflected back to me.

After an initial series of photographs I realized that I was trying to fit juxtapositions of new and old into the frame of the photograph. For example, one of my initial photographs was street corner. The local shops on one side contrasted with a new Walgreens Pharmacy on the other, in the background. Did these scenes represent boundaries between neighborhoods in the City that attracted new investment and those that did not? Or did the photographs reflect the integration of new investment into communities throughout the city? This question was inspired by my visual exploration, but also became significant to the research I was conducting. I could then ask interviewees about fragmentation within the community and about enclaves that were developing. I met with Daphne Politis, a consultant who had examined the school systems in Chelsea. She shared her report with me, which included a map of the neighborhoods and their characteristics. This is given in Figure 2. Without the visual clues, I may not have been drawn to the questions and to this line of inquiry.

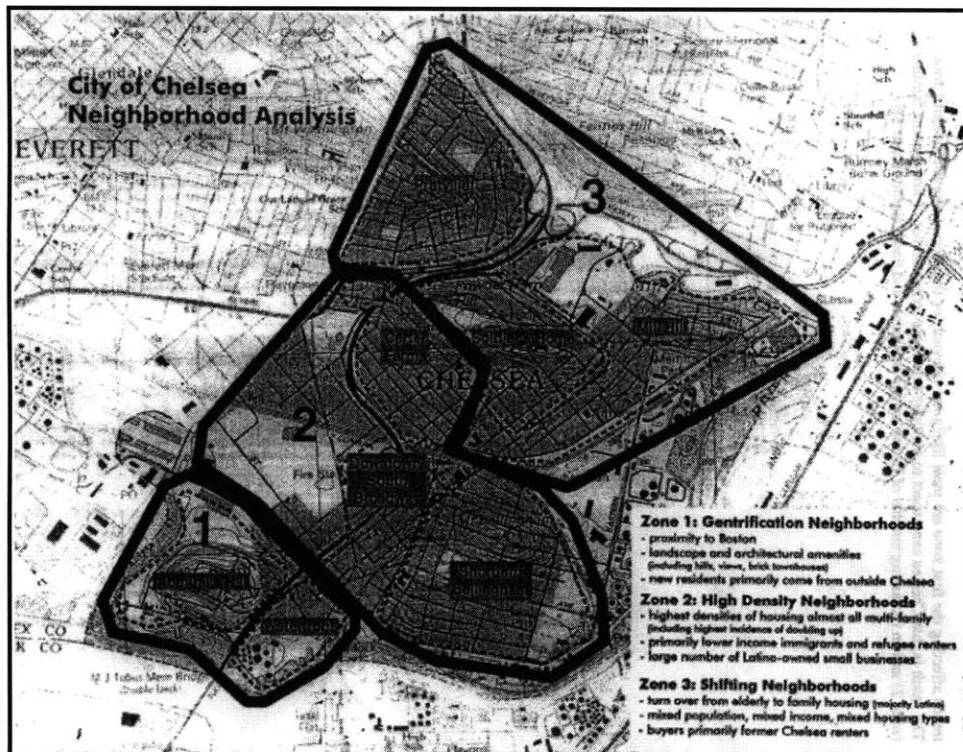
In another series of photographs I found myself looking at the Tobin Bridge from different parts of the city. This reminded me of Joel Myerowitz's *St. Louis and the Arch*. In Myerowitz's series of the Arch from different parts of St. Louis, I had been left with striking impression of the different perspectives from which residents look towards the Arch. I was inspired to look towards the Tobin Bridge and the Boston skyline from different neighborhoods in Chelsea. This spoke to the fragmentation of the community from another angle. I began to identify the weight of the metropolitan use of land on this local community.

I began crossing the divides that split the city, including Interstate Highway Route 1 and State Highway Route 16. Across Route 16 a pocket of Chelsea appeared very different from the rest of the City. This was a quiet enclave with a number of parks and a school being renovated into condominiums. I spoke with a resident who was interested in why I was taking photographs, and he revealed to me that this neighborhood has changed very little in the past decade. This led me to see some of the divides that existed before receivership and to question how these have been ameliorated or exacerbated by the new planning processes. One hypothesis I pose is that perhaps the struggle between local and metro has exacerbated the fragmentation of the City by generating

investment in the desirable enclaves, while those neighboring the industrial sites continue to struggle.

Overall, the visual analysis led me to questions and served to focus the questions I was working with. As Walter Benjamin notes, “The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.”<sup>9</sup> Given the value of the visual investigation in this thesis, I would emphasize it more in future research. Alongside the photographic process, extensive journal notes would enhance the process, as well as aid in recalling the evolution of the thought process during the research. This is an area I hope to pursue further in the future.

Figure 2: Illustration of Differentiation in Neighborhood Development



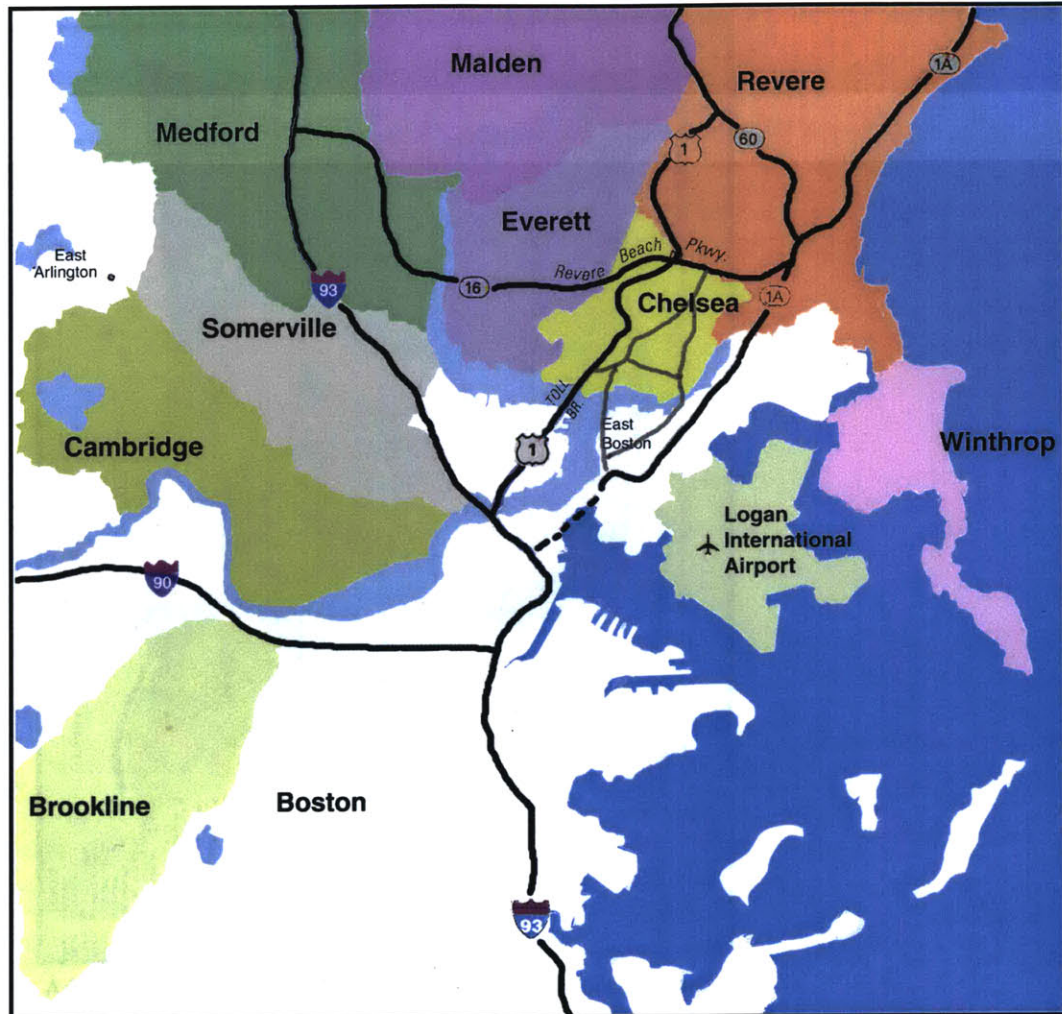
Source: Politis, Daphne. (January, 2000) *Demographic Study and Enrollment Projections: Chelsea Schools; Chelsea, Massachusetts.*

<sup>9</sup> Goldberg, p. 332.

## APPENDIX B: TIMELINE

June, 1986	Legislature approves loan to Chelsea for \$5 million. Financial Control Board created
June, 1986	\$1.3 million in emergency assistance granted by State
Spring 1986	Andrew Quigley and Mayor Brennan approach Dr. Silber at Boston University to manage Chelsea Public Schools
April, 1988	Boston University submits plan for managing Chelsea Public Schools to city of Chelsea
May, 1989	Boston University Partnership begins
April, 1991	Override of Proposition 2 ½ rejected by Chelsea voters
May, 1991	House of Rep votes to decrease local aid by \$326 million
June, 1991	Chelsea receives \$960,000 from State
June – August 1991	Ad hoc committee considers the future of Chelsea
September 3, 1991	Mayor Brennan's \$3.4 budget approved by aldermen
September 4, 1991	Budget rejected by State finance control board
September 6, 1991	Governor Weld files legislation for receivership
September 12, 1991	Governor Weld appoints James Carlin as receiver of Chelsea
July 31, 1992	James Carlin steps down as receiver Harry Spence promoted to receiver
January 1993	Susan Podziba and Roberta Miller submit proposal for writing a new city charter
October, 1993	Susan Podziba and Roberta Miller begin consensus process
June 21, 1994	New charter approved by voters
August, 1995	Harry Spence submits final report of receiver to the Massachusetts Legislature

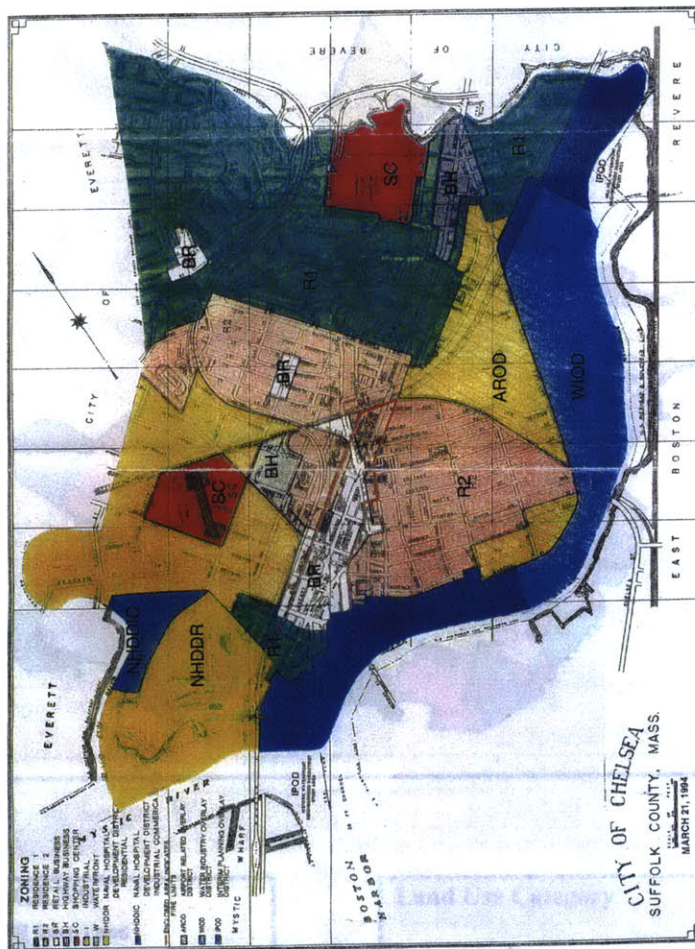
## APPENDIX C: METROPOLITAN CONTEXT MAP



Note: For illustrative purposes only, map proportions are not exact.



## APPENDIX D: ZONING MAP



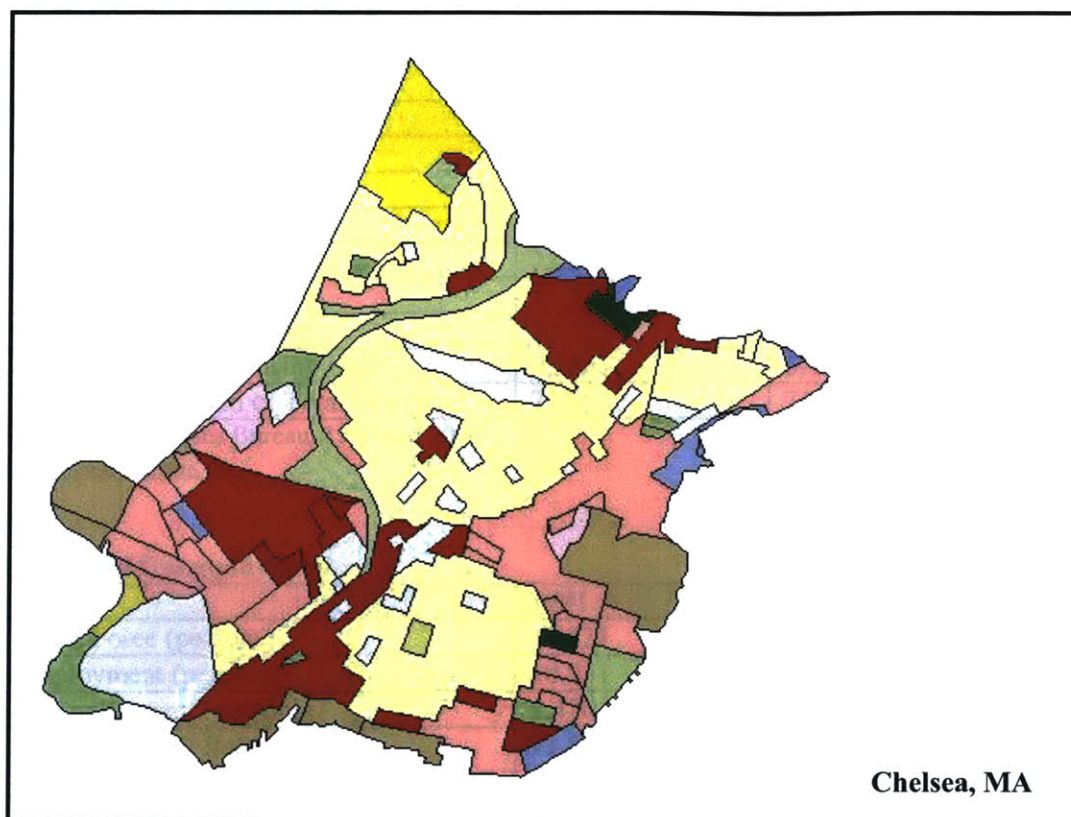
Adapted from the City of Chelsea Zoning Ordinances, Revised 1995

### LEGEND

R1	Residence 1
R2	Residence 2
BR	Retail Business
BH	Highway Business
SC	Shopping Center
I	Industrial
W	Waterfront
NHDDR	Naval Hospital Redevelopment District
AROD	Airport Related Overlay District
WIOD	Water Industry Overlay District
IPOD	Interim Planning Overlay District



## APPENDIX E: LAND USE PROFILE



LEGEND	
	Open Land
	Recreation
	Residential
	Residential
	Wetland
	Commercial
	Industrial
	Urban Open
	Transportation
	Waste Disposal
	Marina
	Urban Public
	Transportation Facilities
	Cemeteries



Land Use Category	Area (square meters)	% Total
Open Land	41,592	0.73
Recreation	162,018	2.83
Residential	2,131,802	37.30
Wetland	32,138	0.56
Commercial	810,451	14.18
Industrial	1,162,403	20.34
Urban Open	69,270	1.21
Transportation	254,758	4.46
Waste Disposal	67,287	1.18
Marina	24,921	0.44
Urban Public	516,522	9.04
Transportation Facilities	427,198	7.47
Cemeteries	15,081	0.26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,715,441</b>	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

## APPENDIX F: DEMOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT

### Population and Housing Stock

	1990	2000
Population	28,710	35,080
Median Age	NA	31.3
White	20,005	20,328
Black or African American	1,492	2,544
Hispanic or Latino	9,018	16,984
Average Household Size	2.67	2.87
Total Housing Units	11,574	12,337
Occupied Housing Units	10,553	11,888
Renter Occupied Housing Units	7,588	8,448
% Renter Occupied of Total Occupied	72%	71%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000

<http://www.census.gov>

### Labor and Unemployment

	1991	2000
Labor Force (persons)	12,421	12, 113
Employment (persons)	10,951	11,636
Unemployment (persons)	1,470	477
Unemployment Rate	11.8% (statewide 9.1%)	3.9% (statewide 2.6%)
Total Annual Payroll	\$239,862,378	\$457,352,153
Average Annual Wage	\$26,235	\$34,849

Source: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training

<http://www.detma.org/lmi/local/Chelsea.html>

## APPENDIX G: HISTORICAL PORTRAIT

Nadine Mironchuk, a lifelong resident of Chelsea, is active in current City politics, but also in tracing the history of development. Mironchuk recollects that before the revolution the cities of Chelsea and Revere constituted one locality, founded as Winnimisset. Chelsea was established as an independent City in 1857. Though the Battle of Bunker Hill has taken precedence in history books, she points out that the Battle of Chelsea Creek also played a pivotal role in the American Revolution. And, the City prospered after the Revolution. However, the downfall of Chelsea can be traced to April 12, 1908 when a fire roared through the city destroying municipal, commercial and residential development and prompting an exodus to suburbs north of Chelsea and leaving an impoverished city behind.<sup>10</sup>

Chelsea was first connected to Boston with the Chelsea North drawbridge.<sup>11</sup> In the 1930's the State government appropriated resources to a study for the improvement of the bridge, subsequently subsidizing the construction of the bridge, and displacing 326 families (in 186 homes) in Chelsea<sup>12</sup> in its wake. The permanent division of the city, loss of taxable land and the loss in value to neighboring properties, along with the imposition of major on/off ramps in heart of business district and in residential neighborhoods still anger residents today. Soon thereafter, the injury was compounded by the construction of the six-lane State highway Route 16 through the western part of the city.

For a small city, Chelsea has suffered a number of major catastrophes, including two major fires that consumed significant commercial, residential, and municipal property, the first, as mentioned, in 1908 and a second of significant magnitude in 1973. Lead paint chips rained from the Tobin Bridge, plaguing the health of the community, and a repainting effort continues till today.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with the author

<sup>11</sup> Kelly Davenport, (1999) *The Tobin Bridge: Its History and Politics*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Davenport, p. 32

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